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JEWISH PROSELYTE INITIATION AND ITS POSSIBLE INFLUENCE
ON EARLY CHRISTIAN INITIATION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO BAPTISM

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Abstract

The earliest indisputable evidence for proselyte lustration is later than the beginnings of Christianity. All the non-Rabbinic references to the subject are found to be suspect. However it is likely that some kind of washing was performed to rid the candidate of the pollution of idolatry. Pre-20th century discussions of possible antiquity are mostly spoiled by party interests and suffer from lack of knowledge of Judaic washings in the first century B.C. onwards.

Although purity was the primary aim of the lustration, it is clear that the whole initiation acted as a consecration to a new life. It may have been seen as a piece of prophetic symbolism and later Rabbinic sources connect it with the forgiveness of sins and a personal recapitulation of Israel's history.

The lustration was by immersion, self administered and witnessed. The rules pertaining to the menstrual bath about 'intervention' applied. There are traces in the New Testament of self-baptism and this may explain a Syriac linguistic curiosity and the Eastern Church's use of the declaratory passive formula for baptism.

John's baptism may be an application of proselyte washing to Jews who deemed themselves to be apostate. There are parallels between John's rite and that of proselyte baptism although the eschatological element is lacking in the latter..

The washings at Qumran have no direct relevance to this discussion, but they form part of the link between proselyte, John's and Christian baptism.

Various New Testament passages echo Rabbinic teaching about the proselyte initiation rite. It is accepted that 1 Peter has a baptismal background and possibly reflects the proselyte rite. At the beginning circumcision and baptism were practised. Under the influence of Paul

the former was discontinued. It is certain that catechisms in use for proselytes would have been used for Gentile converts.

Abbreviations

AJT	American Journal of Theology
Ath.R	Anglican Theology Review
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
BQ	Baptist Quarterly
BT	Babylonian Talmud
ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics
HDAC	Hastings Dictionary of the Apostolic Church
HDB	Hastings Dictionary of the Bible
HDCG	Hastings Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JTh.S	Journal of Theological Studies
NT	Novum Testamentum
NTS	New Testament Studies
RdQ	Revue de Qumran
SJTh.	Scottish Journal of Theology
TWNT	Theological Wordbook of the New Testament
TZTh.	Tübingen Zeitschrift für Theologie
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

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Note

Parts of Chapters 1 and 2 have been published in an article, 'Jewish Proselyte Baptism', Expository Times 95 (1984) pp.141-145

An introduction to 'Jewish Proselyte Initiation, and its possible influence on early Christian Initiation (with special reference to Baptism)'

Primitive society made much of life crisis rituals, apparently recognizing their importance in helping individuals through the difficulties of transition and preparing society to accept them in their new roles. Although Jewish proselyte initiation, in common with all conversion rites is alien to the norm (since it means separation from a natural group and incorporation into another), it does fulfil the vital role of marking the movement from one status to another. This role it shared with early Christian initiation and this investigation will attempt to explore whether or not it shares more than this basic element.

There is no question that the initiation rite included circumcision. Likewise, it is clear that later, baptism and an offering were required. The main interest of this project is in the lustration element, (since that is the main ingredient in Christian initiation) although the other parts will not be ignored. At the outset, it cannot be denied that there is no conclusive proof that the Jewish rite for accepting proselytes included baptism before A.D. 70. Circumcision was the decisive rite. However, it will be shown by comparisons of meaning and practice that the likelihood of its use prior to John's baptism is very great. It does seem to have had some influence on early Christian baptism and this is another argument in favour of its antiquity unless evidence is shown to suggest that the Jews borrowed from the early Christians.

John's baptism is of great interest and the question whether or no he (or others) saw it as a kind of proselyte baptism extended to

Jews who had forfeited their right to the covenant privileges through disobedience, will obviously affect the view of proselyte baptism's influence on the Christian rite.

Although no major work dealing exclusively with the subject has appeared in English for over 200 years, there have been references in books and articles concerned with Christian baptism, but often the writers have been content to make their assumptions on the evidence of secondary sources. A fresh investigation is overdue, particularly as it is now obvious that there was an upsurge of interest in lustrations in the period 100 B.C.-A.D.100. Even though Qumranic washings have no direct relevance to the subject in themselves, they do point to this preoccupation with purifications which doubtless underlies the water rite part of proselyte initiation.

The instruction of proselytes is another area of interest, since the method and content of such catechism may well underlie the early Christian versions when the influx of Gentiles into the Church would make such teaching necessary.

After A.D. 70, the importance of the water rite was enhanced. Sacrifice could not be offered, so that for women, who formed the great majority of candidates, baptism was the only applicable rite.

Chapter 1: The Antiquity of Jewish Proselyte Baptism

According to the Law (Exodus 12:48), circumcision is the only requirement demanded of the proselyte, yet Moses Maimonides (A.D. 1135-1204) says that 'in all ages' a proselyte needed to be circumcised, baptized and in the days when the Temple stood, he had to bring an offering.¹ When did the water rite become an indispensable part of the proselyte's initiation? The earliest indisputable evidence is as late as the end of the first century A.D., when Christian baptism was well established.² Could it be that missioning Jews copied the Christian initiation rite? The attractiveness of baptism as an alternative to circumcision is obvious and while there is little evidence for converts being allowed to dispense with circumcision, some substitute must have been in use during the reigns of Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) when all circumcision was forbidden following Barcochba's revolt (A.D. 132-135) and Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-161) who relaxed the law by forbidding circumcision only to those of another race.³

On the subject of the substitution of the water rite for circumcision, C.H. Kraeling, whilst admitting that the evidence is meagre, gives three suggestions - the first two, a passage from Epictetus and one from the Sibylline Oracles will be discussed later when it will be seen that they are unlikely to be about proselyte initiation. The third concerns Josephus' description of the conversion of King Izates of Adiabene (A.D. 1-53) (Antiquities, 20,2:4). Kraeling says he was admitted as a convert to Judaism without circumcision.⁴ This is not strictly true. Izates was converted through the instrumentality of Ananias, a Jewish merchant, who, fearful of the effects of the King's circumcision, was content that he should believe. Eleazar, who represents the uncompromising

Jew, insisted on the necessity of circumcision. The King obeyed. A similar tale is told about the Emperor Antoninus who was assured by R. Judah ha-nasi that he would be admitted to the heavenly banquet without circumcision. The Emperor thought it strange, if this were true that he could not be admitted to the earthly Passover without the rite, so he was circumcised. R. Judah said that as a reward Antoninus will head the line of religious proselytes in the world to come.⁵

There is no direct evidence here for dispensing with circumcision, far less for the substitution of a water rite, but perhaps it is legitimate to infer that at least some Jews were not insistent on circumcision for proselytes. Such inference is strengthened by Talmudic reference to the problem (B. Yeb 46ab) where R. Eliezer and R. Joshua debate whether circumcision and ablution are essential. J. Neusner commenting on the discussion says, 'The rules of admitting a proselyte were not settled by early Yavnean times'.⁶ This indicates that the dispute could have taken place at the end of the first century, but might reflect even earlier uncertainty.

This does not help much with the question of dating the proselytes' bath, but the prevailing view is that it is highly unlikely that Jews would have borrowed such an important rite from the Christians at a time of much antipathy between the two groups. A.J. Maclean states decisively, '... the Jews in later times would not have borrowed from the Christians.'⁷ and Kraeling believes that 'a growing sense of historical perspective' shows that the idea of Jewish imitation is improbable.⁸ On the other hand, J.H. Crehan says, 'It is by no means certain that in the period 70-130 in which there was so much polemic between the Jews and Jewish Christians ... no attempt

would have been made by proselyting Jews to offer to intending converts something of the kind of ritual treatment which was offered to them by Christian missionaries.'⁹

Some scholars have made confident assertions concerning the early dating of proselyte baptism. Among these are C.E. Pocknee who says that the matter is proved by modern study of the Mishnah,¹⁰ and before him Marcus Dods wrote, 'The question whether the baptism of proselytes was in vogue as early as the time of the Baptist has been laid to rest by Eldersheim and Schürer.'¹¹ More will be heard of the latter's solution to the problem, but Eldersheim disposes of it in a neat statement, 'That baptism was absolutely necessary to make a proselyte is so frequently stated as not to be disputed.'¹²

In spite of such assurances, the debate continues and it remains true that the Old Testament, Apocrypha, New Testament, Philo and Josephus are silent on the matter¹³ and books that deal with proselytes from the canonical Ruth to the story of Joseph and Asenath do not mention it.¹⁴

Possibility of an early dating is increased by discoveries at Qumran and the knowledge that baptist sects were common before the baptism of John. J.K. Howard thinks that the onus of proof lies with those who do not derive Christian baptism historically from Jewish parallels.¹⁵ On the other hand, G.R. Beasley-Murray, after stating that, 'the pre-Christian origin of proselyte baptism is regarded by the majority of investigators as axiomatic' and giving an impressive array of opinions from those in favour of its antiquity, goes on to warn that the two who have examined the question in depth, viz. W. Brandt (*Die Jüdischen Baptismen*, Giessen 1910) and Joseph Thomas, (*Le mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie*,

Gembloux, 1935), 'show a marked caution in this respect and tend to minimize the extent to which proselyte baptism was practised in the first half of the first century A.D.'. ¹⁶ Brandt indeed makes the point elsewhere that the rite of proselyte baptism would have developed gradually, so we may not infer that the practice was widespread and observed everywhere. ¹⁷ However, he is not as cautious as Beasley-Murray would have us believe, for he says ' Mit solchem Vorbehalt jedoch darf immerhin als gar nicht unwahrscheinlich angenommen werden, dass die jüdische Proselytentaufe ebenso alt oder auch älter sei als die christliche'. ¹⁸

It is fair to say that the New Testament use of *βαπτισμα* is only intelligible if some similar rite was widespread. ¹⁹ The word is of course a Christian neologism, ²⁰ without a background in pagan or Jewish literature and is the technical term for Christian baptism. However, the related *βαπτειν* and *βαπτισειν* are found in the Septuagint. This could indicate, as F.J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake suggest that the word was coming into use in Greek-speaking Jewish circles to mean religious washing ²¹ and it is true that Jewish ritual washings had taken on a special significance in the hundred or so years before Christ. J. Schneider says that the object was 'no longer ritual purity, but a deliverance from sin which would include the whole personality'. ²² This may accurately describe some attitudes and possibly even those of the Qumran Covenanters but it cannot be used as a blanket definition of the many and varied lustrations available in the equally varied sorts of Jewish sects, and it may not cover proselyte baptism. These hints, however make it reasonable to infer that a ritual bath for proselytes developed from preceding lustrations and was in use in the first

century A.D. What must not be taken for granted is the influence of such a rite on early Christian Baptism. Several scholars warn against confusing the separate questions of the rite's antiquity and influence. G.W.H. Lampe, who believes the rite to be early, says of proselyte baptism and circumcision, 'they lie poles apart from the Christian rite which springs from the Messianic baptism of Jesus'.²³ Schneider believes that the two baptisms are completely different in nature.²⁴ In contrast, Frank Gavin thinks the Christian rite took over much that was originally found in the Jewish rite.²⁵ The possible influence of proselyte baptism on the Christian rite will be discussed later, but all that needs to be pointed out here (at the risk of stating the obvious) is that if it can be proved that proselyte baptism did not emerge until after A.D. 70, it would be necessary to discuss the influence of the Christian rite on the Jewish one, rather than vice versa.

One of the problems facing anyone attempting an accurate assessment of the age of proselyte baptism is the difficulty of dating Jewish sources on the subject. Jewish scholars, in the main, seem unconcerned with chronology, so dating sources in the Mishnah or the Babylonian Talmud wherein most references are found is a matter for conjecture.²⁶

More certain, as regards date, are the handful of references to be found outside the Rabbinic literature. The historian and Prefect of Cappadocia, Arrian, was the pupil of Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher and in the notes Arrian took of his master's lectures these words appear, 'When we see a man trimming between two faiths, we are wont to say, "He is no Jew, but is acting a part", but when he adopts the attitude of him who is baptized and has made his

choice, then he is not only called a Jew, but is a Jew indeed'. So we also are but counterfeit 'baptists', Jews in name only, but really something else'.²⁷ This is dated about A.D. 94. J. Thomas, following the earlier suggestion of G. Polster²⁸ thinks that the term **το πλθος** translated, 'attitude' or 'experience' means 'circumcision'.²⁹ If this is correct, then here is evidence that circumcision and baptism were the test of a genuine proselyte. Kraeling, as has already been mentioned, believes that this text gives evidence for proselyte initiation by baptism alone.³⁰ H.G. Marsh however, quotes the suggestion of R. Reitzenstein that **το του βεβαμμενου και ηρημενου** refers to a sect of ascetics and therefore has no connection with proselyte baptism. He sees support for this in the last phrase **παραβαπτισται** 'we are but counterfeit baptists', and by the words in which Josephus refers to the title bestowed on John. **ὁ ἐπικλουμενος βαπτιστης** (Antiquities 18:5:2), which he understands as implying John is connected with this sect.³¹ It must be remembered that Reitzenstein has an axe to grind in that he wants to prove that John's and Christian baptism are a result of syncretism.³³ Another suggestion comes from P.E. Matheson whose note on the passage reads, 'It is not certain whether in this sentence and the next Epictetus is thinking of Jews or of Christians, who at this time were often confused with them'.³³ Long before him, Sir Norton Knatchbull had the same idea, 'I rather think ... that he spoke confusedly or promiscuously and that he rather meant a Christian Jew'.³⁴ It is doubtful therefore whether this text does refer to proselyte baptism. If it does, then it shows that baptism was essential in the initiation of Jewish proselytes at Rome by the end of the first century. This

does not allow that such baptism was practised elsewhere by this date, nor does the dating prove that proselyte baptism must be antecedent to the Christian rite.

The Sibylline Oracles (Bk. 4 lines 163-5) furnish another possible piece of evidence. 'Wretched mortals, repent ye of these things and provoke not the great God to shew all his anger; put away your swords, the slaying of men with groanings and your deeds of violence, wash your bodies from head to foot in running streams and lift up your hands to heaven asking forgiveness for the deeds done aforetime and make propitiation with gifts for your impiety'. H.M. Bate's note on line 165 reads 'Exhortation to accept the baptism of proselytes; a baptism of repentance'.³⁵ Many scholars agree with Bate, but there is an alternative explanation. Bk. 3 lines 591-2 reads 'They lift up to heaven holy hands, rising early from their beds to hallow their hands with water'. Here Bate comments that the ceremonial washing is Pharisaic rather than Essenic in character,³⁶ whilst H.C.O. Lanchester thinks that both references are to Essene washings.³⁷ J. Delorme is sure that the author had links with a baptist movement and comments, 'If the document really were dealing with the baptism of proselytes it would be a completely isolated phenomenon'.³⁸ This passage in the Oracles is dated by most authorities around A.D. 80³⁹ and if it does refer to proselyte baptism it is unlikely that the rite would have been of recent date which could push the age of such baptism back to the early years of the first century. It is certain that the author of this oracle was a Jew of the dispersion (whether of Italy or Egypt is a matter for debate),⁴⁰ so even if it does refer to proselyte baptism it could be evidence only of its existence

outside Palestine. The arguments in favour of it referring to proselyte baptism seem slender and uncertain and it is much more likely that the passage refers to Essenic lustrations or those of some 'baptist' group.

J. Jeremias makes much of Testamentum Levi 14:6 as evidence for the early dating of proselyte baptism. Levi, in this chapter is foretelling the falling away of his children and verse 6 reads, 'And out of covetousness, ye shall teach the commandments of the Lord, wedded women shall ye pollute and the virgins of Jerusalem shall ye defile and with harlots and adulteresses shall you be joined and the daughters of the Gentiles shall ye take to wife, purifying them with unlawful purifications'.⁴¹

Jeremias believes that the last five words refer to proselyte baptism. He thinks that the writer is critical of such baptism, holds it to be unlawful and an encouragement to immorality.⁴² However, it is difficult to see this passage as strong evidence for the early dating of proselyte baptism for two main reasons, the first being the doubt about its meaning. L. Finkelstein, who originally thought it was about proselyte baptism, said that an 'illegal purification' implies that the Gentile women did undergo some purification, but not that demanded by the author. He felt that if the form of proselytization was a subject of controversy we should expect greater explicitness. The writer speaks of priests who would not have been allowed to marry proselytes with any form of purification, Later Mishnaic law absolutely forbade such unions (Kiddushin 4:7), but the early Pharisees would not have sanctioned such a union. Finkelstein suggests a mistake has been made. Possibly the translator saw וְשִׁירְתֶּם (and ye shall betroth),

but thought the root was וְטַהַר and therefore translated 'purify'. The passage would then read, 'And the daughters of the Gentiles shall ye take to yourselves as wives, betrothing them against the Law'.⁴³ This seems a sounder suggestion than that of Solomon Zeitlin who thought it referred to post-menstrual purification, for as Finkelstein points out, 'Jewish women need this purification too'.⁴⁴ However, it is impossible to disagree with D. Smith when he says, 'Every interpreter seems to have his own unique understanding of this passage'.⁴⁵

Jeremias believes it to be connected with the growing belief that the Gentiles were Levitically impure and this leads to a discussion of the second problem, viz. the date of the passage. He thinks that it must 'come from a time in which the assertion that the Gentile was levitically impure was a contested novelty'.⁴⁶ Most scholars think it comes from the end of the 2nd century B.C., which is rather too early for proselyte baptism. One or two (e.g. Torrey)⁴⁷ date the Testaments in the 1st century A.D., while De Jonge believes them to be as late as A.D. 190-255 and the product of the early Church.⁴⁸ It seems unwise, therefore, in view of this uncertainty to base any argument for early dating of proselyte baptism on this text.⁴⁹

The only other piece of non-rabbinic evidence sometimes put forward in this discussion is Juvenal's Satire 14:104-5 where he says that it was the custom of the Jews to show the way only to those who practise the same religion and to lead to the fountain which they seek, only the circumcised. As D.E.H. Whitely says, the obvious interpretation of this is that they only disclose the whereabouts of water to fellow Jews, but Bonsirven thinks it may

be based on a Gentile misunderstanding of the fact that circumcision comes before immersion.⁵⁰ In any case, the date of this text is A.D. 127, far too late to have any interest for the subject in hand.

The references so far have proved disappointing for one trying to establish the antiquity and universality of the proselyte water rite. Even if the writings discussed all did refer to proselyte baptism, none of them proves by their dating that the rite must have been in use during the first half of the first century.

The Rabbinic evidence, at first sight seems more substantial. The Mishnah (Pesachim 8:8) records a dispute between the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai, 'The School of Shammai say: If a man becomes a proselyte on the day before Passover he may immerse himself and consume his Passover offering in the evening. And the school of Hillel say: He that separates himself from his uncircumcision is as one who separates himself from a grave'.⁵¹ H.H. Rowley believes that this 'offers evidence that before the destruction of the Temple the immersion of proselytes was already practised, since it was a matter of controversy'.⁵² Jeremias comments 'One thing is certain - these were Gentiles converted to Judaism ... and this took place before A.D. 30 because, as the New Testament shows, the Shammaite point of view was no longer in force at the time of Jesus'.⁵³ He bases this on the rather slender evidence of John 18:28 where the priestly party would not enter the Praetorium for fear of defilement. A passage from the Jerusalem Talmud says 'R. Eliezer b Jacob says: Soldiers were guards of the gates of Jerusalem: they were baptized and ate their paschal lambs in the evening'.⁵⁴ I. Abrahams says of R. Eliezer b Jacob that he 'is one of the most trustworthy reporters of Temple events and rites which he knew from

personal experience'.⁵⁵ This looks like the first bit of indisputable evidence that proselyte baptism was practised in Jerusalem before A.D. 70 and many are content that this provides sufficient evidence.⁵⁶ Three things cast doubt on the matter, the first being H.H. Rowley's comment that there is no distinction in Hebrew between 'bath' and 'baptism' so that we cannot be sure that this is not a 'mere ritual lustration'.⁵⁷ J.H. Crehan thinks that a date after A.D. 70 would be more suitable than one before it, 'for the idea that during the tumult and stress of an old time pasch, converts would have been found amongst those responsible for public order is not one that suggests^s itself'.⁵⁸ This seems rather a subjective argument fitting in with Crehan's rejection of any influence of proselyte baptism on its Christian counterpart. It would seem that a date after A.D. 70 would be just as unlikely for Roman Soldiers to convert to Judaism - certainly there was plenty of 'tumult and stress' up until the final expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem. The real problem is an extension of Rowley's caution, viz. that both passages deal with Passover and could refer to the normal lustrations connected with that feast.⁵⁹ The earliest non-Passover reference has already been mentioned - the discussion between R. Eliezar^e b. Hyrcanus and R. Jehoshua b Hananiah. R. Eliezar^e, a Shammaite, said that if a man were circumcised he should be admitted as a proper proselyte even without the bath. R. Jehoshua, representing the Hillelite school, said that a man who had taken a bath was to be regarded as a true proselyte even without circumcision. The reasons they gave were founded on Israelite history. 'Our Fathers', said R. Eliezar^e, 'were circumcised without taking the bath'. 'Our Mothers', said R. Jehoshua, 'took the bath but were not

circumcised' (BT Yeb 46a). The Babylonian Talmud in its final form belongs to the medieval period but as has already been said, the two Rabbis flourished around the end of the first century A.D. and this discussion may well be authentic. It is still too late to support an early dating, but it might be argued that the discussion shows that proselyte baptism was no new thing.

It is all too easy, when discussing any of these texts to see possible references to the rite, forgetting that the Jews had a grand system of ritual purifications from which undoubtedly the special proselyte bath developed. It is this which is partly to blame for the difficulty of accurate dating. T.M. Taylor alludes to this in his reply to an earlier article by T.F. Torrance.⁶⁰ He believes that the immersion bath for proselytes was originally the bath of purification following the atonement offering. When the Temple ceased to be, the bath was retained. The same kind of idea is expressed by R Zwi Werblowsky who revised his earlier thoughts on proselyte baptism and now believes it to be connected with halakhic purity. He says that when the notion of Gentile impurity faded, the bath was retained and 'dextrous Rabbinic minds' produced fresh reasons and scriptural authority for the rite.⁶¹

There are, however, other pieces of evidence which may point to proselyte baptism being an ancient and important part of initiation. David Daube has a simple but appealing argument in the fact that female proselytes were always more numerous than males and therefore an initiation rite would have been used for them.⁶² Attractive though this argument is, it is difficult to understand why the Old Testament is silent on the matter. G.R. Beasley-Murray's note on Daube's argument reads, 'The phenomenon of Ruth the Moabitess

which deeply influenced the thought of proselyte reception must have suggested the possibility of a woman entering Judaism without baptism'.⁶³ Ruth is notoriously difficult to date and the suggested time of composition varies from early pre-exilic to late post-exilic times, but in any case it was written before proselyte baptism was established anywhere. Werblowsky says that the author of Ruth did not think of his heroine undergoing baptism because the notion of pagan halakhic impurity due to association with idolatry had not yet evolved. He says, 'In fact, at some point the very institution of proselyte conversion must have been a revolutionary innovation: that had to overcome more basic and halakhic notions of impurity'.⁶⁴ The Midrash Rabba on Ruth 3:3 comments that 'Wash thyself and anoint thee' means 'to clean thyself of idolatry and display good deeds and righteous conduct',⁶⁵ which shows that at a later date a bath was necessary to remove the taint of idolatry. This leads to a consideration of E. Schürer's attempt to cut the gordian knot by stating that Gentiles qua Gentiles were levitically impure and therefore needed a cleansing bath before admission to Israel.⁶⁶ If this is so, the discussion is at an end. Proselyte baptism is of early date and it is merely another levitical lustration.

When were the Gentiles first regarded as unclean? It is true that originally the Torah was thought to be binding on Israel alone, so that the Levitical impurity could apply only to the Jews. Zeitlin was quite definite that the Gentiles were not regarded as unclean until A.D. 65, when a conclave responding to the resurgence of nationalism forbade Jews to associate with Gentiles.⁶⁷ Finkelstein disagreed because he believed many old laws were re-enacted in A.D. 65 and earlier customs approved, which could suggest that the

Gentiles were regarded as unclean much earlier.⁶⁸ Smith quotes Zeitlin with approval, but fails to mention Finkelstein's reasonable caution. Smith does make the obvious point that there must have been some reason for Gentile uncleanness being declared. Jeremias believes that Gentiles were regarded as impure in the later part of the 1st. century B.C. as part of an attempt to stop mixed marriages, a contention which Smith says 'cannot be substantiated'. He is not convinced by Jeremias' reference to the case of Simeon, the High priest in A.D. 17-18 who was unable to function on the Day of Atonement because a piece of Arab spittle had accidentally fallen on him.⁷⁰ He dismisses without investigation that 'some New Testament passages imply a type of uncleanness of the Gentiles'.⁷¹ There is support in the Gospels and Acts for the notion of Gentile uncleanness. John 18:28 has been mentioned, but Mt.8:5-13 (cf Lk.7:1-10, John 4:46-53) shows that Jesus did not enter the houses of Gentiles. Indeed, the Roman Centurion implies that he is aware of the prohibition in his, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof'. There are no recorded instances of Jesus entering a Gentile dwelling,⁷² and Peter's dealings with Cornelius in Acts 10-11 also imply that Gentiles were regarded as unclean. In Acts 10:28, Peter says, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean'. The same point is made in 11:12 '... and the Spirit told me to go with them making no distinction'. Does this imply that Gentiles were levitically unclean in the thirties of the first century? Two notes of caution must be sounded. The first is that the Gentiles might well have been

considered levitically unclean when the Gospels and Acts were written, but it cannot be uncritically assumed that they report the earlier situation accurately. They may be making the point that now, at the time of writing it is normal for Jews to regard Gentiles as levitically unclean. The second point is brought out by G.R. Beasley-Murray in an extended note on Gentile uncleanness. He says, 'I can see no solution to this problem other than postulating a distinction between the uncleanness to which the Jew is susceptible and the uncleanness of the Gentile'.⁷³ Adolf Büchler likewise makes a distinction between 'religious' and levitical uncleanness and concludes that the levitical impurity of the Gentiles was invented 'by the Rabbis about the year 1 as a novelty going beyond the Law in Lev, 15'.⁷⁴

David Daube believes that the Gentiles were outside the sphere of levitical uncleanness and quotes the Palestinian Talmud (Pesahim 91b) where it is stated that before his conversion a proselyte was a heathen and not susceptible of levitical uncleanness. (The same point is made in Bab.Tal. Yebamoth 16a). He says, 'Pagans were not susceptible of levitical uncleanness, so in principle there was simply no room for purification'.⁷⁵ Daube is not arguing against the existence of the proselyte's bath here, he is merely saying that it was not a levitical lustration. H.H. Rowley was most careful to distinguish between levitical lustrations and proselyte baptism, for of course, the distinctive nature of proselyte baptism would be lost if it were simply the first of many levitical washings the proselyte would have to undergo.⁷⁶

It seems probable that the levitical impurity or otherwise of the Gentile is a red herring drawn across the quest for proselyte

baptism. Smith says that it is not obvious that proselyte baptism would be the cure for Gentile uncleanness.⁷⁷ However, it is highly likely that before the Christian era some Jews at least were concerned about possible Gentile impurity and the likely way of dealing with it would be the bath. G.W. Buchanan introduces a new aspect when he discusses baptism and hospitality customs. He points to the need for bathing and clean clothes when a non-observant Jew entered a strict Jew's home. 'It was this practice that identified baptism closely with initiation and admission into a community'.⁷⁸ Such a practice could underlie proselyte baptism.

The main arguments for the antiquity of proselyte baptism have been, a) the written, non-Rabbinic evidence which has been shown to be suspect in every case, b) the Rabbinic evidence which suffers from unreliability of dating and in possibly early material, the difficulty of association with the Passover, c) the two deductive arguments, - the unlikelihood of Jewish borrowing from the early Christian rite and the fact that it was the only initiation ceremony available to the numerous female proselytes. Both ideas suffer from lack of positive evidence. It is wise to conclude therefore that there is no firm evidence for a water rite used in proselyte initiation before the time of Jesus. It is impossible to prove conclusively at what date such a rite emerged, so that those who argue for a late first century dating are in no better a position than those who think that it is earlier.

However, even if positive proof of proselyte baptism as a widespread phenomenon in early days was available, it might have no relevance for the institution of Christian baptism. The real interest lies in the possibility of showing, from the meaning given to proselyte

baptism, that there is a link between that rite and early Christian baptism.

Notes and references

1. Issure Biah 13:2f. (De jure pauperis et peregrini edited by Prideaux (London 1679) p.113)
2. I accept as indisputable evidence the discussion between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua recorded in B.T. Yebamoth 46ab.
3. See J. Crehan Early Christian Baptism and the creed (London 1950) p.4.
4. John the Baptist (New York 1951) p. 100 fn7. J. Baumgarten points out that Izates as a convert was obliged to observe all the commandments - including the one about circumcision. 'Exclusions from the Temple - Proselytes and Agrippa 1' JJS 31 (1980) 215-225 (222)
5. Pal. Tal. Meg.1:72b.
6. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus (Leiden 1973) Part 1, p. 180. See also Max Weber, Ancient Judaism (Illinois 1952) p.92 and 421.
7. 'Baptism' in HDAC vol.1 128-136 (129) see also A. Calmet Commentaire litteral sur tous les livres de l'ancien et du nouveau Testament (Paris 1726) Vol.7 p.288
8. Kraeling p.99. See also A. Plummer, 'Baptism', in HDB Vol.1 238-45 (239) and A. Oepke 'βαπτισμα' in TDNT (E.T.) Vol. 1 (London 1965) p.535.
9. Crehan p.4. See also D. Jennings Jewish Antiquities 9th edition (London 1837) p.85. It is of course possible that the two rites developed independently, although this seems unlikely. See D. Smith 'Jewish proselyte baptism and the baptism of John', Restoration Quarterly 25 (1982) 13-32 (14) and M Moreton 'Groundwork for Initiation' Theology 74 (1971) 522-529 (524).
10. Water and the Spirit (London 1967) p.17
11. 'Baptism' in HDCG 168-171 (169)
12. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (38th. printing London 1958) Vol. 2 p.745. See also Strack-Billerbeck Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich 1922-8) Vol.2 p.163.
13. George Gibbs, A defence of Baptists (Norwich 1821) p.13. W.N. Cote, The Archaeology of Baptism (London 1876) p. 5 . Plummer p.239. S. Zeitlin, 'Studies in the beginnings of Christianity', Jew. Quar. Rev. n.s. 14 (1923-4) 11-139 (131).
14. But R.T. Beckwith uses Joseph and Asenath in his list of evidences for proselyte baptism. 'The Jewish background of worship' in The Study of Liturgy edited by C.P.M. Jones, G. Wainwright and

E. Yarnold (London 1978) p.39-51 (p.44).

15. '... into Christ. A study of the Pauline conception of baptismal union', Expo.T.79 (1968) 47-50 p.48 fn 1. See also his New Testament Baptism (London 1970) p.12.
16. Baptism in the New Testament (London 1962) p.18-19.
17. 'Baptism (Jewish)' in ERE Vol. 2 p.408
18. Die Jüdischen Baptismen (Giessen 1910) p.59
19. See W.F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London 1948) p.4
20. J. Ysbaert, Greek Baptismal Terminology (Nijmegen 1962) p.28
21. The Beginnings of Christianity (London 1942) Part 1 p.334
22. Baptism and the Church in the New Testament (E.T. London 1957) p.16
23. The Seal of the Spirit 2nd. edition (London 1967) p.83
24. Schneider, p.23
25. The Jewish antecedents of the Christian Sacraments (London 1928) p.24-58.
26. See A. Greenup Sukkah Mishnah and Tosefta (London 1925) p.4 and for a fuller discussion J. Neusner Early Rabbinic Judaism (Leiden 1975) p.73-99.
27. Dissertationes 2:9. (P.E. Matheson's translation in Epictetus: the Discourses and Manual (Oxford 1916) Vol. 1 p. 170-171.
28. 'Der Klein Talmudtraktat über die Proselyten', Angelos 2 (1926) 1-21. (21)
29. Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie (Gembloux 1935) p.361
30. Kraeling p.100 n.7
31. The Origin and significance of New Testament Baptism (Manchester 1941) p.10 quoting R. Reitzenstein Die Vorgeschichte der christlichen Taufe (Leipzig 1929) p. 232-233
32. Reitzenstein p.231
33. Matheson vol.2 p.249
34. Annotations upon some difficult texts in all the books of the New Testament (Cambridge 1693) p.309-310. See also J. Gale, Reflections on Mr. Wall's History of Infant Baptism (London 1820) p.286-7. Thomas Emlyn thinks that by this time Jews and

Christians were sufficiently distinguishable. Works Vol. 1 (London 1746) p.400. Jennings p.85 and James W. Dale, Classic Baptism 2nd edition (Philadelphia 1868) p.348.

35. The Sibylline Oracles Books 3-4 (London 1918) p.91
36. Bate p.73
37. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament edited by R. Charles (Oxford 1913) Vol.2 p.389&196
38. 'The Practice of Baptism in Judaism at the beginning of the Christian era', in Baptism in the New Testament edited by A. George (London 1964) p.25-60 p.34. See also Thomas p.46-48
39. Charles Vol.2 p.373
40. Bate p.24
41. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs translated by R.H. Charles (London 1917) p.34
42. Infant Baptism in the first four centuries (E.T. London 1960) p.26
43. 'The institution of Baptism for proselytes' JBL 52 (1933) p.203-211 (205)
44. 'A note on the baptism of proselytes' JBL 52 (1933) p.78-9 and Finkelstein p.204
45. Smith p.20
46. Jeremias p.28
47. The Apocryphal literature (New Haven 1945) p.131
48. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (London 1953) p.121-125. Note that G.W.E. Nickelsburg says, 'The present form of the collection of the Twelve Testaments is clearly Christian'. He discusses the problem briefly. Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah (London 1981) p.233-234
49. Smith p.19
50. The Theology of Paul (Oxford 1964 p. 167. J. Bonsirven Le Judaisme Palestinien Vol. 1 (Paris 1934) p.29-30
51. The Mishnah translated by H. Danby (Oxford 1933) p.148
52. 'Jewish Proselyte baptism and the baptism of John' HUCA 15 (1940) p.313-334 (316)
53. Jerusalem in the time of Jesus (E.T. London 1969) 3rd. edition p.321
54. Jerusalem Talmud Pes. 8 (Krotoschin edition 1866 36a) translated

- by M. Schwab (Paris 1882) 5 p.131
55. Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels 1st. series (Cambridge 1917) p.37
 56. e.g. E.R. Hardy, 'Jewish and Christian Baptism' in A tribute to Arthur Vööbus edited by R.H. Fischer (Chicago 1977) p. 309-318 (310). But note that Smith says 'the situation depicted in this passage cannot be earlier than A.D. 70' p.21
 57. Rowley p.317
 58. Crehan p.3
 59. Thomas p.358 fn.2
 60. 'Proselyte baptism' T.F. Torrance NTS (1954) 150-154 and 'The beginnings of Jewish proselyte baptism' T.M. Taylor NTS 2 (1956) p. 193-198 Note that M-J Lagrange had the idea that the bath preceded circumcision as a preliminary cleansing. L'Evangile de Jesus-Christ (Paris 1928) p.59
 61. 'A note on purification and proselyte baptism' in Christianity Judaism and other Graeco-Roman cults edited by J. Neusner (Leiden 1975) Part 3 p.200-205 (p.204)
 62. The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London 1956) p.106-107
 63. Beasley-Murray p.25 note 2
 64. Werblowsky p.201
 65. Ruth, Midrash Rabba translated by L. Rabinowitz (London 1939) p.69
 66. The Jewish people in the time of Jesus Christ (Edinburgh 1898-1900) Vol.2 p.322
 67. 'The Halaka and the Gospels' HUCA 1 (1924) p.357-373 (p.360)
 68. Finkelstein p.207-208
 69. Smith p.18
 70. Jeremias Kindertaufe p.30
 71. Smith p.17
 72. Smith p.18 See Mt. 8:8 and compare 15:21-28
 73. Beasley-Murray p.21 n.2
 74. 'The levitical impurity of the Gentile in Palestine before the year 70' JQR 17ns (1926-7) 1-81(80)
 75. Daube p.107

76. Rowley p.315. See also his 'The origin and meaning of Baptism' in BQ 11 (1942-5), p. 309-320
77. Smith p.18
78. The Consequences of the Covenant (Leiden 1970) p.198-222

Appendix to Chapter 1

An historical survey of views on proselyte baptism in the 17th-
19th centuries

For the most part, the debates of the 17th-19th centuries are of historical interest only, for today, what Henry Ainsworth wrote in 1616, 'Whereupon baptism was nothing strange unto the Jews when John the Baptist began his ministry'¹ is fact rather than conjecture insofar as it is now known that in general lustrations were in vogue at this time. Thomas Godwyn writing a little later suggests that the Jews might have been expecting baptism at the coming of Messiah and so it was 'long in use'.² Jeremy Taylor takes up the point believing that the ceremony of baptism before that practised by John was 'so certain and usual'.³ A similar view is expressed by Henry Hammond, both in his 'The baptizing of Infants' and in 'Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the books of the New Testament', where he uses Arrian as his proof for the antiquity of proselyte baptism. He sees parallels in Jesus' teaching too, citing Mk. 10:29 and Lk. 18:29 as possible references to the fact that after proselyte initiation former relations were repudiated.⁴

J. Lightfoot's Horae Hebraicae shows that he believed both in proselyte baptism's antiquity and its influence on the early Christian rite. He says it was used first by Jacob (Gen. 35:2), that Israel was brought into the Covenant by baptism and that proselytes were admitted by baptism in David and Solomon's days and that such usage confirms infant baptism.⁵

Two dissentient voices of the 17th century were J. Owen who

believed that the idea of proselyte baptism's antiquity was 'destitute of all probability'⁶ and Sir Norton Knatchbull who holds firm to the uniqueness of John's baptism and says of the proselyte rite, 'I can scarce find any footsteps of it in the Old Testament'.⁷

The century ends with George Hooper's championing the cause of early dating in his A Discourse concerning Lent. His views are particularly interesting, when as will be shown, many writers of this time are guilty of anti-semitism, or at least, anti-rabbinism, fearing that the uniqueness of Christian baptism would be compromised should the Jewish version be proved to predate it. Such a view is sometimes mildly expressed today. For example, in 1974, W.L. Lane could write of John's baptism and its possible predecessor, 'No clear line of dependence can be shown ... Baptism appears rather as an unique activity of this prophet'.⁸ George Hooper, on the other hand says there is no need to be concerned that it was a 'disparagement to the Christian religion to be thought of Jewish extraction' and goes on to state plainly, 'And as certainly as our blessed Saviour and his apostles were of Hebrew lineage, so certain it is, that our religion is grafted on the Jewish'.⁹

Peter Zorn opened the eighteenth century with, De baptismo Proselytorum Judaico Sacramento veterus Testamenti juxta Lightfootum et alios recentiores (Leipzig 1704). As his title indicates, Zorn worked over Lightfoot's earlier work. Anti-Pharisaism is evident in the work (e.g. p.9) and he suggests that the custom is late, perhaps to distinguish Jews from Samaritans or even in imitation of Christian baptism (p.39-49).

In 1705 William Wall published his History of Infant Baptism (London). The introduction to Volume 1 is devoted to proving that

the Jews baptized all converts and their children and that this baptism was in use before the time of John the Baptist. His contention is that this practice underlies paedobaptism. He was answered in 1711 by John Gale in a series of letters published as 'Reflections on Mr Wall's History of Infant Baptism'. Letters 9 and 10 deal with Wall's arguments on proselyte baptism and Gale's main points are those used today, viz. the Rabbinic authorities are too late and that there is no warrant in Old Testament Scripture for such a practice.¹⁰ Gale of course is one of the many who betray party interest in their selection of evidence. As a Baptist, he was anxious to destroy Wall's arguments for infant baptism.

Continental scholars make reference to the debate too, mostly on the side of opposing an early date. G. Wernsdorf, De baptismi Christianorum mere divina (Wittenberg 1710) thinks that the Jews stole baptism from the Christian Church after their city was destroyed. G.G. Zeltner, De Initiis Baptismi initiationis Judaeorum (Leipzig, 1711) supports Wernsdorf, but links it with the growing expectation of the appearance of the Messiah. J.A. Carpzov, Apparatus Historico Criticus Antiquitatum (Frankfurt and Leipzig 1748) vehemently contends for the uniqueness of Christian Baptism as something that developed by direct divine inspiration, not as an ordinance of the Rabbis.

Back in England, Richard Kidder lent his support to those believing in proselyte baptism's antiquity and influence on Christian baptism.¹¹ In a series of pamphlets, Caleb Fletcher, although aware of the doubts about the antiquity of the rite, says, 'I have all along represented it as a Jewish rite which Jesus adopted'.¹²

Thomas Emlyn introduced a new element in the debate in his 'Previous Question relating to Baptism'.¹³ Here he draws what he believes to be the logical conclusion from Wall's contention that infant baptism is legitimately derived from the custom of baptizing the children of proselytes with their parents. Emlyn thinks that when Jesus issued the command to baptize (Mt. 28:19) he meant that it should be done according to the known custom, otherwise rules would have been given. The known custom did indeed include children, but only the children of first generation proselytes and then only those born before their parents' conversion. It follows therefore that 'none of the posterity of Christians descended from baptized parents in a continued Christian line, not interrupted by open apostasy from Christianity are bound by Christ's institution to be baptized' (p.398). Jesus' command was to proselytise and baptize the nations - consistently with Jewish practice (p.403). He concludes that 'Mr Wall must either allow that baptism is to cease or that he cannot justify it by Jewish practices' (p.402).

David Jennings in his lectures on Godwyn's Moses and Aaron, - Jewish Antiquities (London 1766) is not at all sure that proselyte baptism existed at the time of Christ and feels that it is likely that the Jews borrowed from the Christians rather than vice versa.¹⁴ John Gill, the hyper-Calvinistic Baptist Minister of Horsleydown, Southwark, produced a Dissertation concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes (originally published at the end of his 'Body of practical Divinity' London 1771). His arguments are not new, namely that the Talmudic evidence is too late, scriptural evidence is lacking, and like Emlyn he says that the logical conclusion to the affair would be that Christian baptism must conform to the strictures of Jewish

baptism. Rules about witnesses, depth of bath and the prohibition of baptism of a child whose mother was baptized whilst carrying him would have to be observed.

Two continental scholars who argue passionately for the antiquity of proselyte baptism are Isaac de Beausobre and Jacques L'Enfant. In their 'Introduction to the Reading of the Holy Scriptures (E.T. Cambridge 1785), they use Jesus' command to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost and John's allusion to the three witnesses of the Christian religion (1John 5:8) as a conscious parallel to the three witnesses required at proselyte baptism. Likewise, the interrogation of the candidate at the beginning of proselyte initiation is thought to be the background of John the Baptist's questioning of the religious leaders in Mt.3:7-10.¹⁵

In the last decade of the century, Robert Robinson, a Baptist Minister, brought out his 'History of Baptism'. He is reluctant to discuss the subject of proselyte baptism suggesting that if only Christians would realize that 'Jewish traditions neither have nor ought to have any force with Christians', this uninteresting subject could be left alone. In any case, there is no proof that it existed before the time of John and such proof will never be forthcoming.¹⁶ Robinson obviously feels that if proselyte baptism were to be established as the forerunner of Christian baptism, it would empty the latter of its divine appointment and 'Christianity would lose much of its glory'.

The same variety of opinions is evident in the 19th century. William Frend in his letters to Bp. Pretyman of Lincoln revives Emlyn's opinion that there is no need to baptize the children of Christian parents. He believes the retention of baptism to be due

to a misconception of scriptural passages and a lack of attention to three circumstances, viz., the precept for baptizing was given to the apostles without charge for perpetual observance, it was not to be baptism of individuals but nations and that the peculiar favour of Christ in this commission was limited to a period of about 40 years.¹⁷

In 1814, E.A. Bengel suggested that proselyte baptism came into use gradually as a Pharisaic addition to the requirement of circumcision, but that it became an absolute requirement after the overthrow of the state.¹⁸ The following year, C. Taylor not only stated firmly that it was older than the Christian rite, but that its significance was death - 'the past life of the party to be as distinct from his ensuing life as the lives of two separate people'.¹⁹ Thomas Belsham in 'A plea for Infant Baptism' (London 1817) again takes up Thomas Emlyn's points. He rather extravagantly claims, 'The existence of proselyte baptism among the Jews at least as far back as the beginning of the Christian Era is unanimously affirmed by the Rabbis' (p.3), something vigorously denied by George Gibbs, who thinks rabbinical writings to be 'labyrinths of error'.²⁰ James Gilchrist agrees. 'The legendary lore of the Jewish Rabbins is a mass of mere absurdity, not only devoid of all authenticity and credibility, but without a single ray of Genius to enliven its darkness or to relieve its dullness'.²¹ To the question 'Did proselyte baptism exist before the time of Christ?' he replies, 'We have no hesitation in replying to it by a most decided and unqualified negation' (p.135). The two rites, in any case are entirely different, for proselyte baptism initiates a person into the Jewish race, Christian baptism into the Christian religion (p.142).

Another contender for the uniqueness of Christian baptism is Abraham Booth, who opens the second volume of his Paedobaptism Examined (London 1829) with a long section examining previous views, Continental and British on the antiquity or otherwise of proselyte baptism. He comes to the conclusion that, 'If this Talmudical bathing be the true basis of infant baptism ... it has but a sandy foundation and threatens an opprobrious fall'(p.32-3).

On the other side of the Atlantic, Moses Stuart believes it possible that proselyte baptism is early, but says, 'we are destitute of any early evidence',²² whereas R. Halley says that it is scarcely possible to escape the impression that baptism must have been a well known rite previous to its administration by John.²³ John H. Godwin, a Congregational minister, introduces a new thought in his contention that proselyte baptism is not mentioned by early authorities because of the simple character of the rite and its frequent occurrence. Later, he thinks the rite was expanded and corrupted.²⁴

In the 1860s two Baptist writers mention the subject - W. Stokes, who could not believe that Christian baptism was derived from the 'idle innovations of the Rabbis' and R. Ingham who was certain that John's baptism was the first ever performed.²⁵

Obviously every piece of writing on the subject in these three centuries has not been mentioned, but this selection provides a fair example. Other works are listed in H. Malcolm's References to the Principal Works in every department of Religious Literature (Boston 1868). However, these references do show two important aspects of the discussion. First, almost all authors have an axe to grind. The anti-rabbinism has been mentioned, but it will also be

observed that those on the paedobaptist side tend to argue for the antiquity of the rite, because of the inclusion of proselytes' children, whilst those who favour Believer's baptism argue against for the same reason, although the mode of proselyte baptism, (immersion) helps Baptists to argue for their particular method of baptism.²⁶

Second, it is plain that there is still no watertight proof of proselyte baptism before the time of Jesus and the many scholars from the 17th century onwards who have argued that the Old Testament, Apocrypha, New Testament, Targums and early Church Fathers are silent on the matter have never been refuted.

References

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2. Moses and Aaron (London 1626) p.12
3. Discourse on Baptism (London 1652) p.4
4. The Baptizing of Infants (London 1655) p.2-3&10, A paraphrase and Annotations upon all the books of the New Testament (London 1653) p.15
5. Horae Hebraicae et Talmidicae (First published Cambridge 1658, New edition, translated by R. Gandell Oxon 1859) Volume 2 on Mt.3:6 p.54-5
6. Theologoumena (Cambridge 1661) p.445
7. Annotations upon some difficult texts in all the books of the New Testament (Cambridge 1693) p.309-10
8. The Gospel according to Mark (London 1974) p.49
9. (London 1695) p.154&156
10. Gales' 'Reflections' are conveniently published with Wall's History of Infant Baptism edited by H. Cotton (London 1852).
11. A Demonstration of the Mëssias (London 1726) part 2, p.176-7
12. A defence of Infant Baptism (London 1742) p.21&70
13. Published in his Works (London 1746) Vol. 1
14. P.85 of the 9th edition (London 1837)
15. Published in Vol.3 of A Collection of theological tracts in 6 Volumes, edited by R. Watson, p.194
16. (London 1790) p.30
17. Animadversions on the Elements of Christian Theology by Rev. G. Pretyman, Bishop of Lincoln in a series of letters addressed to his Lordship by Wm. Frend. (London 1800)p.19
18. Über das Alter der jüdischen Proselytentaufe (Tübingen 1814)p.115
19. Facts and evidences on the subject of Baptism (London 1815) p.14
20. A Defence of Baptists (Norwich 1821) p.13
21. 'The Perpetuity of Christian Baptism maintained' in Four lectures

on Christian Baptism edited by J. Evans (London 1826) p.111-116 (p.134)

22. Is the Mode of Baptism prescribed in the New Testament?
(Andover 1833) p.69
23. The Sacraments (London 1844) Vol.1
24. Christian Baptism (London 1845) p.73
25. A History of Baptists (London 1863) p.7
A Handbook on Baptism (London 1865) p.81
26. An excellent historical account is given by D.M. Himburg, 'Baptismal Controversies 1640-1900' in Christian Baptism edited by A. Gilmore (London 1959) p. 273-305.

Chapter 2: The Meaning of Proselyte Baptism

It is unlikely, in view of the multiplication of washings evident in the first century A.D. that a convert from paganism would be admitted to the elect company of the chosen people without some form of lustration.¹ Was this the only function of proselyte baptism? some think it was. G.W.H.Lampe makes the uncompromising statement that, 'baptism was a lustration for the removal of ceremonial uncleanness of heathenism'.² Likewise, J. Delorme sees it as a remedy for 'the greater impurity of paganism!'.³ Whether or no pagans were thought to be susceptible to levitical uncleanness prior to A.D. 65(4), the first bath of a proselyte would be seen as an initiation into the system of purification he would then have to follow. M. Simon makes the point, 'Il élimine cette impureté rituelle qui, accidentelle chez un juif est chez un goy congénitale. La pureté qu'il confère aux prosélytes ne leur est pas acquise une fois pour toutes. Il ne les dispense pas de recourir par la suite aux ablutions usuelles'.⁵

It may be accepted that proselyte baptism has its roots in washings for purity, but this does not preclude development in meaning and practice. Some would see the origins of Christian baptism in such washings⁶ but no one would argue that their meanings are identical. H.H. Rowley warns against identifying proselyte baptism with ordinary lustrations⁷ and it seems obvious that a witnessed ceremony preceded by instruction must be something more than simple ablution. Yet purity is the primary aim. Purity regulations applied particularly to the Temple, and J. Neusner believes that the dominant trait of Pharisaism before A.D. 70 was a concern for ritual purity. One must behave at all times as if one were about to enter the Temple. It could be argued that the New Testament emphasises this characteristic

of the Pharisees and shows that they wanted the whole nation to behave as if it were a royal priesthood.⁸ After the destruction of the Temple, purity laws were still maintained in readiness for its restoration. Proselytes joining the Pharisees, like all Jews were to be regarded as Temple priests and priestly purification may well be another part of the meaning of proselyte initiation. Again, some have seen this as the only reason for the bath, viz. a necessary preliminary to the third part of initiation, the proselyte's offering. After A.D. 70, it was retained although its purpose was forgotten and it developed a new meaning. T.M. Taylor, who holds this view, has the interesting, though unsupported idea that the normal order (circumcision; bath; offering) should be altered so that the bath followed the offering as a purification.⁹ G.R. Beasley-Murray also attaches the bath to Temple ritual and removes it from the sphere of heathen uncleanness, by regarding it as a necessary preliminary for worship for one who has already become a Jew by circumcision.¹⁰ If this is true, it seems strange that such importance is attached to the bath. If the candidate has already passed from paganism to Judaism, why must the bath be witnessed? Why was instruction given to the candidate as he stood in the water? All attempts to minimize the significance of the proselyte's bath fail when it is seen how great a weight is placed on it by Rabbis accepting candidates for proselyte initiation. However, regarding the bath as a priestly ritual does give another clue to its meaning. M. Goguel points out that levitical ablutions were negative in character: 'Their function was to remove impurities which had been contracted for purely physical reasons'. This was not so for priests and levites; for them 'They were both a purification and a

consecration'.¹¹

The bath can now be seen to include a backward and a forward look. The initiate is cleansed from the idolatrous past and consecrated into a future holy state. As well as being a rite of separation, it is also a rite of incorporation. It brings the candidate into fellowship with the people of God and emphasises the radical break he had made with his past life. The whole rite was regarded as effecting a radical change in his status before God and his fellow men. N. Levison comments that the baptism of a proselyte, 'meant his cleansing from Gentile relationships'.¹² The relationship aspect is of great importance. After initiation, the proselyte had no Gentile kin. 'One who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born' (BT Yeb.48a). The one instrumental in his conversion 'is as though he created him'.¹³

Jeremias thinks that here we have the background to such texts as Gal 6:15 and 1Peter 2:2,¹⁴ but there are two problems connected with such an assumption. First, the Rabbinic sayings do not refer solely to the baptismal part of the initiation, but second and more importantly the idea of the proselyte as a new born child refers to his legal status. Rabbis discussed whether or no a proselyte might marry a near relation now that his former connections were severed. Various passages in the Mishnah make it clear that the proselyte's legal status was much discussed.¹⁵

The proselyte is cleansed from the past, he is initiated into the people of God, but what of his sins? Washing away the Gentile past is not quite the same as dealing with sin. Cultic washings were not prescribed initially for the cleansing of sin¹⁶ and it is important to realize that impurity resulting from childbirth or contact with a dead body was not the same as guilt in an ethical

sense. Bathing after such an event could be interpreted as a transition rite. The situation has changed. In one, new life has begun, in the other, a relationship has been broken by death. Recognition of the change means that some rite must be performed before the worship of God can begin again. Can we then describe washings and the proselyte baptism in particular as 'mere ritual'? R.E.O. White says that such a description 'is a serious and misleading anachronism'.¹⁷ The Old Testament lays great emphasis on ceremonial washings prescribed for uncleanness incurred in various ways (e.g. Lev.15, Num 19). That these washings were not merely external is obvious from a study of Jewish thought. It must be clearly understood that Hebrew anthropology did not distinguish between 'body' and 'soul', for the physical and psychic were two sides of a unity. As H. Wheeler Robinson said in his well-known passage, 'Hebrew psychology has been approached too often under the influence of Greek dualism ... The Hebrew idea of personality is an animated body and not an incarnated soul'.¹⁸ Whatever affects the body must make its impact on the soul. This is not to accuse the Jews of primitive ignorance. They were aware of a difference between an 'inner' and 'outer' person, but they were not prepared to separate them. Unfortunately later scholars have dared to make that distinction and so, W. Bousset for example argues that the significance of proselyte baptism must be wholly ceremonial because all such washings were purely external acts required by the Law.¹⁹ They were indeed required by the Law. In performing the ritual, the man or woman was showing a desire to be clean, to be ready for fellowship with God. He or she was following the God-ordained way of regaining purity. Maimonides writes of the purity laws, 'It is plain and manifest that the laws about uncleanness are decrees laid down by scripture and

not matters about which human understanding is capable of forming a judgement; for behold they are included in the arbitrary decrees' (Mikwa'ot XI:12) Obedience is fundamental to acceptance with God. It is therefore hard to maintain that proselyte baptism is 'wholly ceremonial' or 'merely ritual'. R.E.O. White believes that to do so is to offer insult to Judaism. 'To suggest that for several centuries the spiritual leaders of a people whose religious insight and piety have enriched the world, maintained public religious performances completely devoid of inner meaning and supposed to remove a purely fictitious uncleanness is simply incredible'.²⁰ The ritual bath is used as a simile for moral cleansing at the end of the Mishnah Tractate Yoma. 'Blessed are ye O Israel. Before whom are ye made clean and who makes you clean? Your Father in heaven. As it is written, And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean. And again it says, O Lord the hope (Miqve) of Israel, as the miqve cleanses the unclean, so does the Holy One cleanse Israel' (Yoma 8:9). ('Miqve' carries the double meaning of 'hope' and 'immersion pool'.) The same kind of idea is present in Bab. Tal. Taanith 16a where R. Adda b. Ahaba says, 'A man who is guilty of sin and makes confession and does not turn from it, to whom is he like? To a man who has in his hand a defiling reptile who even if he immerses in all the waters of the world his baptism avails him nothing; but let him cast it from his hand and if he immerses in only 40 seahs of water, immediately his baptism avails him'. Of course neither passage refers to proselyte baptism, but the general principle is plain; lustration is not merely external, neither are its effects independent of the candidate's attitude. This still does not answer the question, 'Were the candidates' sins forgiven in the initiation act?' Adolf Büchler was quite clear,

'There is no evidence for the assumption that the immersion prescribed for the proselyte was instituted to wash off symbolically his numerous sins'.²¹ Rabbis Hillel and Shammai taught that the daily public sacrifice removed temporarily or washed away completely the sins of the nation. It was sacrifice not lustration that dealt with sin.²² Those who regard the Sybilline Oracle reference as dealing with proselyte baptism see this as confirmation of remission of sins obtained by such baptism.²³ However, it is important to remember that the proselyte's initiation was not complete without the sacrifice.

'The proselyte's atonement is not complete until the blood of the offering has been tossed for him against the base of the altar' (Mishnah Kerithoth2:1). G. Vermes has pointed out the importance of the blood element in circumcision and its relationship with sacrificial ideas²⁴ so it is unlikely that forgiveness of sins would be attached to the bath while the Temple still stood. Later on, it is clear that forgiveness was associated with proselyte initiation. It is noteworthy that Tractate Gerim 2:6 (dated during medieval times, but containing early material) records a discussion between Rabbis Jose and Judah. Jose said that a proselyte would be called to account for his pre-conversion sins, but Judah said he would be like a new-born child. Scholars interpreted this to mean that all his sins would be forgiven.²⁵ As has already been pointed out it is all too easy to fall into the trap of applying such a saying to part of the initiation rite. On the other hand, in many cases the baptism part was the only applicable section of the rite and the part must have stood for the whole. However, this does not allow that cleansing from sin was associated with proselyte initiation from the start. All that can be said is that it became

attached to the baptismal part later through expediency. There is no explicit reference in the rite to repentance and confession of sin,²⁶ but as Kraeling says, 'Conscious disassociation from a sinful past and entry into a condition of acceptability before God were included in the transaction.'²⁷ It is clear too, as has already been mentioned that it was an act of self dedication, sanctification for service to the God of Israel.²⁸

May the word 'sacrament' be used in connection with Jewish washings and in particular the proselyte's bath? The answer depends on the definition of the term. The one offered in the Book of Common Prayer catechism, 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us ...' is clearly foreign to Jewish thought. O.C. Quick is near, 'Any spatio-temporal reality which by its occupation of space or time expresses to us God's will and purpose',²⁹ but it is R.E.O. White who gives the best definition, 'In the last analysis it is the person doing what God wills that is the sacramental fact; in this, so to speak 'dynamic sacramentalist' sense it is true to say that every act done in obedience to the received will of God is sacramental and will achieve its end in divine blessing.'³⁰ Here is the essence of the teaching of Leviticus. Grace is supplied because the participant has accepted the way provided to gain cleanness. Whilst it would be wrong to claim a full sacramental theology in the Old Testament, it does seem right to say that a 'rudimentary and germinal sacramentalism ... flourished ... from the Old Testament into Rabbinism'.³¹

Perhaps the clue may be found in prophetic symbolism. H.H. Rowley says, 'not infrequently the Prophets did odd things'.³² Viewed objectively this is true and has led some to question the mental

health of some prophets notably Ezekiel who is the prophet par excellence of symbolism (e.g. Ezek.3:1-3, chs 4&5). What may be made of such acts? Are they merely visual accompaniments of the spoken word? H. Wheeler-Robinson defines prophetic symbolism thus, '... whole series of acts performed by the prophets in connection with, yet in relative independence of, their oral prophecies'.³³ Some have seen in such symbolism a survival of mimetic magic and it is important to make the distinction clear. Wheeler-Robinson goes on to say, 'The prophetic act, by being in miniature or fragmentary form that which God will accomplish becomes part of the means through which God will bring it about'.³⁴ God is not forced into action by what happens, rather it is part of his plan to allow prophetic co-operation with his power. For the Jew, God commanded a particular action and that action issued in God's blessing. It was not for him to question the ways of God. The proselyte's bath could be seen in this light. Of course, the once off prophetic symbol performed for one specific purpose, (and that generally a prophecy of doom) is rather different from the settled tradition of proselyte washing. The proselyte need not enquire how the bath affected him, body and soul, he had only to see it as a requirement of God to attain religious 'fitness'. D. Daube makes this plain when he quotes Johanan b. Zakkai to the effect that, 'neither did a person become really unclean by a corpse nor did he become clean by the water of separation, but the relevant provisions must be observed because it was the will of God'.³⁵

The bath then is cleansing, initiatory and develops into a symbol for the forgiveness of sin, but there are two other areas that need investigation. First, the concept of death as part of the initiation

rite. It has already been said that the rite emphasises a radical break with the Gentile past. This can be seen as death.³⁶ The school of Hillel taught, 'He who separates himself from uncircumcision is like one who separates himself from the grave (Mishnah Eduyyoth 5: 2). This could be interpreted as corpse uncleanness, but as Daube says, 'the phrase, 'like one who separates himself from the grave' indicates that their starting point was the idea that spiritually heathenism equalled existence in a tomb'.³⁷ Clearly this evidence applies to circumcision, but the discussion surrounding it concerns the bath. Shammai said it could be taken immediately so that Passover might be enjoyed, but Hillel said the candidate must wait seven days for his bath. So the whole initiation rite is seen as a crossing from death to life. It is noteworthy that in the description given in the Bab. Tal. it says, 'When he comes up after his ablution, he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects' (Yeb.48b). Daube hints that here, 'comes up' - 'ala, may mean 'to rise from the grave'.³⁸ Is this the background to such New Testament passages as Ephesians 2:1 and 1John 3:14? Even J.H. Crehan who thinks that proselyte initiation had no influence on New Testament ideas about baptism admits that Paul may have been influenced by the notion of the proselyte making a fresh start.³⁹ The Jewish scholar Kaufman Kohler thinks Paul's notion 'is but an adaptation of the pharisaic view'.⁴⁰ J.C. Kirby is sure that the idea of 'making alive' in baptism is not christian in origin, but was taken over by Christianity from Judaism. However, he emphasises that the Rabbinic teaching did not have the depth of meaning later attached to baptism.⁴¹

This idea of a great new beginning is linked to the idea that the proselyte must enter Israel as the Hebrews did. He must 'come out of Egypt and pass through the Red Sea into the promised land'.⁴²

The problem of the non-Jew is stated in the Talmud. 'Why are idolaters lustful? Because they did not stand at Mt. Sinai. For when the serpent came upon Eve he injected a lust into her. (As for) the Israelites who stood at Mt. Sinai, their lustfulness departed: the idolaters who did not stand at Mt. Sinai, their lustfulness did not depart. R. Aha, son of Raba asked R. Ashi, What about proselytes? Though they were not present their guiding stars were present as it is written' (he quotes Deut.29:14-15) (B.T. Shabbath 145b-146a).

At Sinai, the Israelites lost the pollution of the serpent, through the cleansing power of the Torah they were new born.⁴³ So the proselyte, standing in the water hears part of the Law read to him. He too enters the experience of Israel. D.M. Stanley says of the whole package of proselyte initiation, 'It seems that this ritual arose from the Jewish consciousness of the necessity for a Gentile proselyte of repeating the triple experience of the qahal in Israel which prepared people for the Sinaitic Covenant - they were circumcised a second time, (inferred from Jos. 5:2-3), they were baptized in the desert and they shared the covenant sacrifice (Ex.24:3-8).⁴⁴ The Rabbis saw the initiation of a proselyte as a recapitulation in his person of the salvation history of Israel. Whether or no this recapitulation explanation is as early as the early first century A.D. is impossible to tell. R. Zwi Werblowsky's latest view of the proselyte's bath has already been mentioned.⁴⁵ However, it is not intrinsically impossible that a nation with such a consciousness of history as Israel should have formulated such a reason for this type of initiation in very early days. F.W. Dillistone comments, 'Indeed it is not unlikely that the imagery of the Red sea deliverance was responsible for the creation of the rite of proselyte baptism which seems to have originated at a time not long before the

Christian era'.⁴⁶

It is now possible to sum up what seem to be the main strands of meaning of proselyte initiation. The baptism part seems to have had a purificatory meaning, perhaps originally from the stain of idolatry. As Halley put it, 'It was purificatory from the uncleanness of heathenism, not from the defilements of the Law'.⁴⁷ For the Pharisees, at any rate, another element is present, that of priestly purity.⁴⁸ A later development seems to link it with the forgiveness of sins, although this probably refers to the whole of the conversion ritual, not just the bath (see Jer.Tal.Bikk.iii 3 65c 61). The purification led to a new moral stance which included the performance of washings within the levitical system. However, it is clear that the first bath of the proselyte was something special and apparently unrepeatable.⁴⁹ The whole ritual can be seen as an initiation into the chosen people, not simply the lustral part as T.W. Manson believes.⁵⁰ The initiation too included consecration, self-dedication to the God of Israel.⁵¹

At some stage, the idea of recapitulation appeared. That which happened to Israel from her escape from Egypt, to her emergence as a Covenant people at Sinai must be gone through by the initiate. The baptismal part is sometimes referred to the Red Sea passage, and sometimes the washings before the actual Covenant ceremony. The candidate, having experienced these things had a new status towards God and towards his new nation of Israel. The whole complex of initiation rites incorporates the proselyte into the people of the Covenant. It will not do to make a neat separation of the various parts as N.A. Dahl does, 'Through circumcision he is incorporated into the people of the covenant; through immersion he is consecrated to take part in its holy worship'.⁵² To do this is to reduce the bath

to the level of an ordinary lustration again. The proselyte, through the whole process, had passed from death to life, had become legally and morally a new person and was now in all respects an Israelite with all the privileges and responsibilities such status conferred. For many proselytes the only marker of this great change would be the immersion bath.

Notes and references

Page numbers in the Mishnah refer to H. Danby's translation (Oxford 1933)

1. W.F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London 1948) p.16
2. The Seal of the Spirit 2nd edition (London 1967) p.83
3. 'The Practice of Baptism in Judaism at the Beginning of the Christian Era', in Baptism in the New Testament edited by A. George (London 1966) p.26-50 (p.31)
4. See the discussion in chapter 1
5. Verus Israel (Paris 1948) p.333. See also C.F.D. Moule, Worship in the New Testament (London 1961) p.59
6. e.g. Robert Ayres Christian Baptism (London 1907) p.5
7. 'Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John', HUCA 15 (1940) p.313-334 (p.315&326)
8. Early Rabbinic Judaism (Leiden 1975) p.43-44 and 'The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from A.D. 70-100' in Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt (Berlin 1979) p.3-41 (p.23). Hyam Maccoby has drawn my attention to the important point that Judaism did not insist on conversion for the attainment of salvation. A Gentile observing the Seven Noahide Laws and worshipping God could be reckoned among the righteous. He thinks that becoming a Jew was more like entering the priesthood and that one of the influences on Proselyte Baptism was the induction rite of the Aaronic priesthood (Leviticus 8:6)
9. 'The beginnings of Jewish Proselyte Baptism', NTS 2 (1956) p.195-6 (p.195)
10. Baptism in the New Testament (London 1962) p.29
11. The Primitive Church (E.T. London 1964) p.284-5
12. 'The Proselyte in Biblical and early post-Biblical times', SJTh. 10 (1957) p.45-56 (p.50)
13. Midrash Rabba Genesis Rabba 39:14 on Gen. 12:5 translated by I. Epstein (London 1939) Vol.1 p.324
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15. e.g. Shebiith 10:9 (p.51), Yebamoth 11:2 (p.234) Hullin 10:4 (p.527)
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17. The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation (London 1960) p.68

18. The People and the Book edited by A.S. Peake (London 1925) p.362
19. Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter revised by H. Gressman (Tübingen 1926) p.199
20. R.E. White p.66 note 2
21. Studies in sin and atonement in the Rabbinic literature of the First Century (London 1928) p.373
22. See C.G. Montefiore 'Rabbinic concepts of Repentance' in JQR 16 1903-4 p.209-251 (p.215). Also S. Schechter, Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (London 1909) chapters XVII & XVIII p.293-343.
23. W.K. Lowther Clarke, 'Holy Baptism' in Liturgy and Worship edited by W.K. Lowther Clarke p.410-428 (p.411)
24. 'Baptism and Jewish Exegesis' in NTS 3 (1957-8) p.309-318. See also the revised form of this article in Scripture and Tradition in Judaism (Leiden 1961) p.178-192
25. Note on B.T. Yeb 48b (note 6 p.320 of Socino Edn.) but W.G. Braude Jewish Proselyting in the first 5 centuries of the Christian Era (Providence Rhode Island 1940) says that moral guilt remains and proselyte initiation does not wipe out previous sin and that the statement in Jerus. Tal. Bikkurim 3.3.65d must be understood in a limited sense. p.86. But see Strack-Billerbeck II p.423 Ip.928-30.
26. B.H. Branscomb St. Mark (London 1937) p.13
27. Kraeling p.101-2
28. J.V. Barlet The Apostolic Age (Edinburgh 1900) p.461
29. The Christian Sacraments (London 1927) p.104
30. R.E.O. White p.72
31. F. Gavin, Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments (London 1928) p.5
32. The Servant of the Lord 2nd edition (London 1965) p.125
33. 'Hebrew Sacrifice and Prophetic Symbolism' in JTS 43 (1942) p.129-131 (p.131)
34. Wheeler Robinson p.132. See also H.H. Rowley 'The nature of Prophecy in Recent Study' in HTR 38 (1945) p.1-38 (p.28-29). Also Wheeler Robinson, Redemption and Revelation (London 1942) xxxii and p.250. Also Wheeler Robinson 'Prophetic Symbolism' in Old Testament Essays edited by T.H. Robinson (London 1927) p.1-27

35. Numbers Rabba on 19:2 (Daube p.107)
36. J. Heron, 'The Theology of Baptism' in SJTh.8(1955) p.36-52 (p.40)
37. The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London 1956) p.110
38. Daube p.112
39. J.H. Crehan Early Christian Baptism and the Creed (London 1950) p.3
40. Jewish Theology (New York 1918) p.417
41. Ephesians, Baptism and Pentecost (London 1968) p.156
42. W.L Knox, St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (Cantab. 1939) p.97.
43. A. Büchler p.317-318. One must be careful here not to suggest the distinctively Christian doctrine of original sin which plays no part in Jewish teaching. Hyam Maccoby suggests that this account of the Sinai incident is really a 'Just-so story' (Why are the Gentiles lustful?', like 'Why do elephants have trunks?').
44. 'The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism' in Theol. Stud. 18 (1957) p.169-213 (p.192)
45. See chapter 1. See also Mekhilta de R.Simon 30, Sifre on Num.108
46. Christianity and Symbolism (London 1955) p.199
47. The Sacraments (London 1834) p.109-110
48. L. Finkelstein, 'The Institution of Baptism for Proselytes' JBL 52 (1933) p.203-211
49. But Isaac Klein suggests that today an apostate Jew who wishes to repent may take the bath and be formally re-admitted. Presumably, a proselyte in similar circumstances could be re-baptized. 'Laws concerning Proselytes' XXI A guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York 1979) p.440-448
50. 'Baptism in the Church' in SJTh.2(1949) p.391-403 (p.392)
51. H.H. Rowley p.327
52. 'The Origin of Baptism' in Interpretationes ad Vetus Testament pertinentes Sigmondo Mowinkel Septuagenario Missae (Oslo 1955) p.36-52 (p.41)

Chapter 3: The Method of Proselyte Baptism

Detailed instructions for the baptism of proselytes are given Babylonian Talmud (Yeb 47a,b.) and Tractate Gerim 1. These cover the whole of the initiation rite with baptism as the centrepiece. First the candidate is presented and discouraged from continuing. If he is firm and gives the correct answer, he receives instruction, is circumcised and when healed is brought for baptism. Two (or three according to Yeb. 46b-47a and Kiddushin 62a,b) learned in the Law witness the baptism and give token instruction in, 'some of the lighter and some of the weightier commandments' as he stands in the water. Then he immerses himself and comes up, 'in all respects an Israelite'. According to Ger.1:5 he is then addressed with 'comforting words'.

Various rubrics are attached to the performance of the rite in particular cases. Women are to be placed up to the neck in water by women while the male witnesses 'stand without' nearby. The rules applicable in the menstrual bath about **חצ'צ'ה** (intervention, separation) must be observed (Yeb.47b). For the bath to be a valid one, every part of the body must be touched by the water. The Mishnah Tractate Mikwa'oth 9 (Danby pp 742-3) gives instruction on what may and what may not 'interpose'. B.T. Niddah 66b quotes the case of a female slave belonging to a Rabbi who bathed, ascended and was subsequently found to have a bone lodged between her teeth. The bath was declared invalid and she had to bathe again.

Special regulations had to be enforced in the case of the baptism of slaves. Yeb. 46a recounts the tale of Valeria whose slaves forestalled her, and by performing the ritual ablution before her, gained their freedom. To prevent this, R. Samuel said, 'He must be firmly held while he is in the water'. A chain was put round his

neck, loosened at the moment of baptism that there might be no interposition, but tightened again so that he could not say, 'I perform the ablution in order to gain the status of a freed man'. As soon as his head is raised from the water a bucket of clay is put on it and he must carry it to his master's house (Yeb.46a).

Other instructions cover the necessity of witnesses so that the convert can be assured of acceptance within the congregation of Israel wherever he may travel, and the time of baptism - it may not take place at night, nor on the Sabbath. The reason for the latter prohibition is discussed in Yeb.46b. Does the bath effect the proselyte's improvement? If not, then it can be performed on the Sabbath, but if it completes his initiation and thereby improves him it cannot happen on the Sabbath. Discussions such as these show how the importance of the bath was still not universally recognised at this later stage.

The other main instruction covers the water itself. The bath must contain 40 seahs (approximately 60 gallons) of water and at the same time be of such a depth that the whole body can be covered (Danby n.5 p.732). If possible it had to be living (i.e. running) water.

Was immersion required? C.F. Rogers published a provocative article suggesting that it was not necessarily by submersion (his preferred word).¹ He disputed the commonly held assumption that

710 implies submersion and notes that its equivalent in the Septuagint is 'dip' -i.e. the application of the liquid to an object rather than vice versa. He cites Gen. 37:31, Lev. 4:6, 9:9, I Sam. 14:27, Ruth 2:14, 2 Kings 8:15 and 5:14 as examples.² He argues from the rubric about women proselytes being put up to their necks in water that men were not similarly placed, maintaining that the regulation is for the sake of decency in the case of women. He refers

to the Halakhic commentary on Lev. 15:16, 'He shall wash in water even though it be a Mikveh, all his flesh; water into which his whole body can enter. How much is this? A cubit by a cubit to the height of three cubits'. He argues from this, 'The object is clearly the sufficiency of the supply, not the shape of the bath'.³ Rogers was clearly influenced by E.B. Fairfield's work⁴ although he acknowledges him once only in his second article.⁵ Fairfield argued against the prevailing assumption that βαπτίζειν means 'immerse'. He pointed out that the examples from classical Greek translated 'dip' or 'plunge' are all in a 'bad' sense.⁶ Could it be that when it came into Jewish use it lost the immersion aspect and developed the cleansing one? There are three occurrences of βαπτίζειν in the Septuagint. The first is 2Kings 5:14, the story of Naaman the leper. Here βαπτίζειν translates ῥίψ which, as has been said, normally means 'dip' or 'immerse'. Although there is no need to envisage anything other than immersion here, the main point is the cleansing from leprosy. Fairfield shows, using Job 9:31 (where ῥίψ is translated μολύνω) that the translators were not wooden in their approach and sought the sense rather than the literal meaning.⁷ He has a good point here and it is taken up by Rogers who says 'The meaning of a word is determined by its use and not vice-versa'.⁸

The second example is most probably not immersion. Judith 12:7 tells of that lady washing herself in a fountain of water near the soldiers' camp. It is unlikely that she would immerse herself in the soldiers' water supply.⁹ Eccclus. 34:25 is about corpse defilement, where the subject was definitely sprinkled. The instructions for the restoration of purity after contact with a corpse are given in

Num.19. Fairfield concludes, 'The entire process of cleansing for a dead body to which the son of Sirach refers, was by sprinkling, and yet he calls it baptism'.¹⁰ He also reports a conversation with a Rabbi on the subject of purification. When he asked whether a specific amount of water was required, the answer was, 'None; the tiniest stream of water would suffice for his most complete ceremonial lavation'.¹¹

Both Dr. Fairfield and Mr. Rogers have a vested interest in this. As upholders of paedobaptism by affusion they need to prove that the early church took its practice from Judaism, particularly from the initiation rite for proselytes.¹² Unfortunately, their prejudice caused them to overlook what appears to be firm evidence on the other side. I. Abrahams quickly replied to Rogers' original article¹³ and pointed out that an unprejudiced reading of Yeb.47b would lead one to assume that the proselyte submerges, then comes up. The female proselyte would, of course, be crouched so that water came up to her neck. She would then dip her head under water. As has been said before, the ritual tebilah required that the head and hair must be covered with water, nothing must intervene. Certainly, an unbiased reading of Tractate Mikwaoth in the Mishnah leads the reader to envisage submersion. At the end of the Tractate there is a curious directive, 'If an arrow was thrust into a man and it is still visible, it interposes; (between the water and his flesh) but if it is not visible, he may immerse himself and eat of the heave offering' (Danby p.745). Since the position of the arrow is unspecified one can only assume that complete submersion would be required to produce a valid bath.

In his second article, Rogers again took up the cudgels, referring

to W. Brandt's suggestion that Yeb. 47b reflected a local usage of the end of the first century A.D.,¹⁴ but he offered no real evidence to support this view.¹⁵ He also alluded to the problem of submersion in Israel. However, even today the vast ancient water storage facilities may be seen in Jerusalem and elsewhere in that country. White's conclusion seems correct, 'There is no reasonable doubt that provision existed in Jerusalem far in excess of anything here required'.¹⁶

Most would agree with Abrahams' conclusion: 'It seems to me that there is no adequate ground for doubting Jewish baptism in the first century was by total immersion'.¹⁷ On the other hand, it would be fair to say that whilst all ceremonial washing, including proselyte baptism was normally by immersion, the uppermost thought conveyed by baptism was purification and thus there could be departures from the norm that were accepted as perfectly valid.

There can be no doubt that baptism was always the act of the candidate. Although proselyte baptism was of necessity a witnessed ceremony, the witnesses watched the act rather than performed it. As H.H. Rowley said, 'Rabbis ... administered the rite though they did not actually immerse the proselyte'.¹⁸ B.S. Easton believed that this was the early Christian method of baptism, basing his argument on the occasional use of the middle voice in connection with New Testament baptism. He believes these to be 'clear survivals of early phraseology'.¹⁹ Such a practice must go back to the time when Christianity was a Jewish sect. As Christianity tore itself away from its Hebrew roots and re-established itself on Greek soil, so it became customary, as in the Greek mystery religions for baptism to be an administered rite.

The claim is an interesting one and most relevant to any study of the possible influence of proselyte baptism on the early Christian rite. His main argument centres around three texts, the first being Acts 22:16. Easton regards this as 'entirely Talmudic in phrasing' and believes that the last phrase ^{ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ} is the Christian equivalent of the ascription uttered by the proselyte as he left the Tebilah. Other commentators are not so ready to translate **βαπτισαί** as 'baptize yourself', preferring 'get yourself baptized'.

²⁰ Newman and Nida say of the verbs, 'both are in the so-called middle voice. They mean something like 'have yourself baptized and have your sins washed away', but most translators render the first verb as 'be baptized'. It seems preferable to do this in English since in meaning there is no difference between the command, 'be baptized' and 'have yourself baptized'.²¹ Modern thought does not entertain the idea that here there is an ancient survival of self-baptism.

In 1 Cor. 6:11, the word 'baptized' is not used, but its equivalent 'washed' - ^{ἀπεχουσάσθε} reflects the voice and tense of the Sibylline Oracles, Bk.4 line 165, which Easton notes, 'may be about proselyte baptism'.²² He also cites Isaiah 1:16 as a possible background to this verse. However, there is no need to translate it as 'you washed yourself' but rather as 'you had yourself washed', with the emphasis on the voluntary nature of the act.²³ Although most commentators regard this verse as being about baptism a dissenting note is struck by J.K. Parratt who says it is 'somewhat precarious to refer 1 Cor. 6:11 unequivocally to baptism ... there is no valid reason why we should not understand the 'washing' in a figurative sense'.²⁴

The third verse Easton discusses is 1 Cor. 10:2. There will be

a later consideration of this verse, but for the moment the interest lies in **ἐβαπτισαντο** which Easton sees again as a primitive survival of self-baptism. Here the critical apparatus shows that P46 originally had the imperfect **ἐβαπτιζοντο** but corrected it to **ἐβαπτισαντο**. A variant reading is **ἐβαπτισθησαν** which has a fairly impressive list of MSS to back it (α ACDG).

Robertson and Plummer think it is a correction to the expression for Christian baptism,²⁵ but even if this verse does point to self baptism, it clearly refers to the Jewish form as it is Jews and not Christians who were baptized into Moses.

The question remains; Jewish baptism was self-baptism, Christian baptism is administered. What caused the change? If it is not too fanciful, might it have entered Paul's head that that the requirements for slave proselyte baptism (the slave was firmly held whilst in the water) would fit in well with his favourite description of himself as **δουλος** ? In Christian baptism, distinctions of sex and status are irrelevant and Paul may have taken the very lowest form of proselyte baptism as the norm for all Christians. However, two points tell against this. First, lack of evidence and second the fact that slave baptism was still in essence, self-baptism. Despite the firm hand, he still immersed himself. A sounder suggestion might be based on the use of the verb **ܐܬܝܢܐ** for 'to be baptised' in Syriac. In contrast to the Greek, where the active **βαπτίζειν** is used for the action of the baptizer and the passive **βαπτισθεσθαι** for the experience of the baptized, Syriac uses an intransitive verb (not attested in Jewish Aramaic) for the action of the baptizand and so has to use the causative of this verb, (the 'aphel- corresponding to the Hebrew hiphil) for the action of the baptizer.²⁶ Does this peculiarity of Syriac go back to a time when

all Christians immersed themselves?²⁷

Undoubtedly, early Syriac Christianity shows many features pointing to Jewish Christian origins²⁸ and it may well be that the word for 'be baptized' is among these features, reflecting a time when self baptism was practised as the normal mode of that rite. It seems a neat conclusion to suppose that the active idea of 'baptize' mirrors the change from Jewish to Greek predominance. If so, it is unnecessary to look to the mystery religions for such a change. Could it be that Christians desired a representative of Christ to perform the baptism underlining the fact that what happens in baptism is Christ's action and not the action of the baptizand?²⁹

Interestingly, most of the Eastern churches preserve the declaratory passive formula, ('N is baptized') rather than the Western performative pattern, ('I baptize').³⁰ This too could go back to a time when at least there was no emphasis on the role of the baptizer; but R.E.O. White's comment on the mode of proselyte baptism puts the whole debate in perspective: 'He may have immersed himself; he did not, and could not possibly baptize himself'.³¹

Proselyte baptism was then almost certainly by total immersion, the candidate standing naked in the water, (a requirement of Christian baptism at least until the time of Chrysostom).³² It was self administered, but was a witnessed ceremony making it different from the ordinary lustrations of Judaism.

Notes and References

1. 'How did the Jews baptize?' J Th.S 2 (1911) p.437-445.
'Submersion' means the complete placing of the body under water, while 'Immersion' means to plunge the body in water. In practice there is little difference in meaning and the words are interchangeable.
2. Rogers p.438
3. Rogers p.442
4. Letters on Baptism (Boston 1893)
5. 'How did the Jews baptize?' J Th.S 13 (1912) p.411-414
6. See J. Ysebaert, Greek Baptismal Terminology (Nijmegen 1962) p.13-14
7. Fairfield p.58
8. Rogers p.437
9. See J. Godwin Christian Baptism (London 1845) p.76
10. Fairfield p.73
11. Fairfield p.110-111
12. See Rogers' latest works Baptism and Christian Archaeology found in Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica Vol.5 (Oxon 1903) p.239-361 and Baptism and the Early Church (London 1925) p.1-12
13. 'How did the Jews Baptize?' J Th.S 12 (1911) p.609-612
14. Die Jüdischen Baptismen (Giessen 1910) p.52&59
15. Rogers 2 p.412
16. Biblical Doctrine of Initiation (London 1960) p.132 note 5.
See also Abrahams p.609
17. Abrahams p.612
18. In his review of H.G. Marsh, The Origin and significance of New Testament Baptism J Th. S 44 (1943) p.79-80 (p.80)
19. 'Self baptism' American Journal of Theology 24 (1920) p.513-18 (p.515)
20. e.g. F.F. Bruce Acts of the Apostles (London 1972) p.428
21. Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles (London 1972)

22. Easton p.514
23. See A. Robertson and A. Plummer I Corinthians (Edin 1911) p.119
24. 'The Holy Spirit and Baptism' E.T. 82 (1971) p.266-271 (p.268)
25. Robertson and Plummer p.200
26. R. Payne-Smith Thesaurus Syriacus (Oxford 1879-81) p.2906-7 gives as Latin equivalents 'descendit in aquas', 'se abluit', 'lavit' among others.
27. It is odd that ܐܡܕ does not exist in Jewish Aramaic. Could this be another of the casualties of Jewish/Christian conflict in the early centuries A.D. (like the Jewish use of LXX etc.)? A different connection is suggested by Robert Murray, namely that 'for the early Judaeo-Christians who knew Hebrew there was a certain felicitous convergence of Hebrew 'amad, to stand, with Syriac 'mad, to duck under water, so that the word as they used it involved a certain play on two aspects, being baptized and 'standing up for Christ'. 'The exhortation to candidates for ascetical vows at baptism 'in the Ancient Syriac Church' NTS 21 (1974) p.59-80 (p.78). This could suggest the common Christian use and so might explain the disappearance of from Jewish Aramaic.
28. S.P. Brock, The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition (Poona 1979) p.1
29. However, it must be remembered that Paul already refers to himself baptizing in I Cor.1:14-17
30. There is a useful comparative survey in A. Raes S.J., Introductio in Liturgiam Orientalem (Rome 1947) p.138-42. The Syrian rites, both Eastern and Western (apart from the Latinized Maronites), the Byzantine and Armenian rites all use the passive. Only the Coptic (and the dependent Ethiopic rites) use 'I baptize you'.
I would like to acknowledge, with gratitude the help given in this section by Robert Murray SJ. As I do not read Syriac most of the discussion comes from his suggestions.
31. R.E.O. White p.63
32. Chrysostom Homily 6 on Colossians edited by E.B. Pusey (Oxon 1879) p.253

Chapter 4: Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John

John the Baptist appears in the Gospels as an Elijah figure, without background, (apart from Luke's birth story) and with no hint as to where he found his message or his baptism. It has been fashionable to search for his origins in an Essene sect, possibly that of Qumran.¹ It is known that the Covenanters sometimes adopted orphan boys and it is conceivable that John, born to aged parents, (if Luke's account is historical) was left parentless at an early age. His father, a poor pious priest would have been in favour with the Covenanters and his son would have been readily accepted by them. W.H. Brownlee poses the question, 'Was John so adopted as a mere boy?'² and it is answered with a confident 'yes' by A.S. Geyser.³ Great caution, however, is necessary in this area since there is no evidence to support such a theory. Some scholars are attracted to the idea,⁴ whilst others deny outright such a possibility.⁵

Such a connection would provide the clue to the background of John's rite, and Qumranic lustrations rather than proselyte baptism would be the root of it. However, G.R. Driver compares John's baptism with that of Qumran and concludes that they are very different rites.⁶ While some of his conclusions are justified, others are clearly the result of reading Christian practice into John's baptism. Qumran, John's and proselyte baptism were almost certainly performed by total immersion, but it may be misleading to portray John's as an administered rite, whilst the others were performed without a minister. It is unlikely that John actually baptized those who came to him, but rather that they followed the normal Jewish practice of self-baptism, perhaps with John as witness after the pattern of proselyte baptism. Administered baptism is a distinctively Christian rite, so that it is easier to see Qumran, John's and the proselyte lustration forming one group, with

Christian baptism as a separate consideration.

John's ceremony was public and performed in the River Jordan. These two facts set it apart from Qumran and the proselyte washing. Nothing could be more different from the private individual washings at Qumran than John's group baptisms. Proselyte baptism too, although witnessed, was private, with proper care taken for the modesty of female candidates - something curiously absent from the accounts of John's rite, leading one writer to ask whether John baptized any women.⁷ However, even with the problem of modesty, it is improbable that John excluded what was probably the larger group of his hearers from a rite which would be more familiar to them as a purity regulation that their male counterparts.

Driver assumes that John summoned his hearers to forsake the world. This he contrasts with Qumran where no mention of this aspect is made.⁸ Surely this is a misreading of the evidence for the Qumran situation is completely different. The novices have already left the world. In fact, John did not ask people to separate themselves from the world. Tax collectors and soldiers were given advice on how to conduct their business (Luke 3:12-14). Such an approach may be compared with proselyte initiation where the convert had to work out his new religion in the world in which he lived.

Unlike Qumran and proselyte initiation, John required no period of probation for his baptism and did not offer entrance into a new society. It might be argued that John's candidates, being Jews, (that there were Gentiles is only an assumption based on the notion that tax-collectors and soldiers would not have been Jews)⁹ did not need instruction and were already within the society of Judaism even if hitherto they had been poor members of it.

Driver (in common with many) assumes that John's lustration was unrepeatable in contrast with the many Qumranic washings. Yet are those who make this assumption confusing it with the Christian rite? G.W. Buchanan writes, 'The idea that John's baptism differed from sectarian baptism because it was a 'once-for-all' baptism in contrast to sectarian repeated washings continues to be affirmed with no new evidence for its support'.¹⁰ W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann in their commentary on Mark say, 'John's baptisms may well have been repeated and there is no indication in the N.T. material that his baptism was a once-for-all rite'.¹¹ C.H.H. Scobie agrees that there is no evidence, but says it could be argued that John baptized large numbers who then returned home, suggesting that the rite was only performed once.¹² Although Mandaism has been discredited as a source of information on John,¹³ it is worth noting that Mandaic baptism is a repeated ceremony. Another indication that there was a tradition of repeated baptisms linked with John comes from the Clementine Homilies 2:23 where reference is made to 'John a day baptist'. Proselyte baptism was, of course, once-for-all, although it might be argued that it was the first of many washings and its importance in this sense was more like first communion than Christian baptism.¹⁴

In spite of Driver's work, it is still possible to see John's baptism as a development from Qumranic washings. It is not necessary to suppose that John borrowed directly but as Beasley-Murray suggests, John could not have been ignorant of the Qumran sect.¹⁵ Neither, of course could proselyte baptism be unknown to him, assuming its existence at that time and although there are elements that link John with Qumran, it is proselyte baptism which furnishes the closest parallel.

Reference has already been made to the early debates on the uniqueness of John's baptism, but many have seen proselyte baptism as the rite that made John's baptism familiar to his contemporaries. J. Lightfoot saw obvious parallels with the rite, even supposing that John instructed the candidates as they stood in the water before they plunged themselves into the river.¹⁶ No-one today can defend the uniqueness of John's baptism, for discoveries at Qumran and modern knowledge of the 'baptist' movement in Judea make it clear that baptism was known at this time. However, it is still possible to argue that John's baptism was something different and that there is no connection in meaning with that which went before. Many feel that the dominant eschatological theme of John's preaching sets it apart. K. Noakes writes, 'The thoroughly eschatological character of John's baptism makes it unlikely that it is derived from proselyte baptism'.¹⁷ G.W.H. Lampe sees the baptism of John attached to eschatological preaching and 'unique in its ethical significance'.¹⁸ Proselyte baptism, he thinks, had little or no influence on John. Erich Dinkler says, 'As far as we know, John was the first to employ baptism as a means of religious purification promising forgiveness of sin and an initiation into the eschatological kingdom of God'.¹⁹

To assess the possible influence of proselyte baptism in ways other than external it is necessary to discover what that baptism meant. Mark describes it as 'a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins'. The candidates performed the baptism in Jordan 'confessing their sins'. That this baptism was incomplete and was but a preparation for Messianic baptism with the Holy Spirit is shown clearly throughout the Gospels and Acts.²⁰

G.R. Driver underlines the preparation aspect of John's baptism. He claimed no saving virtue for it. It was the outward sign of

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an inward penitence, not the condition of entry into a new society. Driver writes, 'the real gift of a new experience would come with the baptism, not with water, but the Holy Spirit which Messiah ... would impart'.²¹ Was it simply that those who came to John

symbolised 'their pledge to become a people prepared by repentance for Jehovah's coming?',²² Was it a moral decision to renounce sin?

A.C. Deane notes that John emphasised the inferiority of his baptism, 'with water' as contrasted with Christ's baptism. He points out

modern commentators' belief that John's baptism symbolised a state of penitence, but his own translation of εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν is

'a sending away of sin' i.e. a decision to stop sinning. There is nothing sacramental, no imparted grace in the act, it was simply

a pledge of renunciation.²³ Certainly any Jew would be firm on the point that forgiveness could not be effected by lustration, but

only by repentance.²⁴ E. Lohmeyer suggests that men and women came

to John's baptism to receive repentance. He cites Mt. 3:11 in support of his claim where Matthew has changed Mark's 'baptism of repentance'

into 'baptism for repentance'.²⁵ Perhaps the clue lies in the

practical details of John's baptism. Unlike proselyte baptism

there could be no period of instruction or examination of motive.

John could not have checked the genuineness of all who came to him.

Those who came would be aware of this and Godwin may well be right

when he says that repentance was not the condition of baptism, but

rather the acknowledgement of repentance as a duty. He wrote,

'The declaration of John is sufficient to prove that the nature

of his baptism was similar to that of Jewish rites being prospective

and not retrospective, hortatory and not attestatory'. He added in

a footnote that baptism would have been described ἐπὶ τῇ μετανοίᾳ ὑμῶν

instead of εἰς μετανοίαν

if repentance was necessary before

baptism.²⁶ This seems nearer the Jewish idea, but it does set a distance between John's and proselyte baptism in that the properly instructed and approved proselyte would have been presumed repentant and forgiven, whereas John's lustration is only an emblem of repentance. The link may lie in Josephus' account of John's baptism which is clearly at variance with the Christian estimate. He comments on Herod's killing of John and calls John a good man who commanded the Jews to exercise 'virtue'. He leaves out all reference to Messianic hopes and says folk came to baptism, 'not in order to the putting away of sins, but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness'. (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18:116-118)

J. Delorme thinks that Josephus is trying to counter those who objected that washing was an easy way to the forgiveness of sins. He believes that Josephus was presenting John in neo-Pythagorean terms, i.e. purification within followed by the bath. He links this with the Essene doctrine that lustrations come only after the soul is purified by a tested conversion.²⁷

Josephus may be reflecting the originally accepted meaning of John's baptism. John was unable to assure himself of the genuineness of each candidate - as he would have done had this been the proselyte rite - so he proclaimed that if a man had already repented, this rite of purification was effectual in restoring him to the new Israel, just as lustration was part of the proselyte's initiation and brought him into Israel. Since Jews could not be re-circumcised, baptism was the appropriate sign of their re-entry among the Covenant people. In fact, similar provision is made today for apostate Jews wishing to return to their faith.²⁸ One difficulty here is the omission of sacrifice, an important part of the initiation rite.

Two possible explanations may be offered. First, later Christian rejection of the sacrificial system caused this part to be omitted, and second, John may have agreed with the Essene rejection of Temple sacrifice. W.S. Duncan believed that John would not have baptized if proselyte baptism had been widespread at that time, 'for it would have given offence to the Jews to be treated as Gentiles'.²⁹ But John may have considered that the nation's sinfulness had reduced it to heathen status and some Jews at least might have agreed and seen themselves as unfit for entrance into the Messianic kingdom without baptism. J. Leipoldt thinks it must have been obvious to those who came for baptism that it was a kind of proselyte initiation.³⁰ W.F. Flemington writes, 'John's appeal was a solemn reminder that the people of God themselves through sin had become 'alien'. They could be brought back and incorporated into the new Israel by an act analogous to that by which a Gentile was incorporated into the people of God'.³¹ E. Schweitzer agrees that if proselyte baptism was practised at that time, (he thinks it unlikely) then, 'John would have classified all Israel with the unclean Gentiles by his practice of baptizing Jews!'.³² E. Stauffer says that John's baptism is a covenant sign of the new people of God. The conditions of the covenant have changed. Jews qua Jews no longer have automatic right of entry into the kingdom.³³ An extreme position is taken by R. Eisler who views John as a political rebel who regarded all those who submitted to Rome's authority as renegades to the Israelite faith. He deduces from this that John required his hearers to repent and be bathed like proselytes to be re-adopted into the new Israel.³⁴ It seems then that most see some sort of connection with proselyte baptism.³⁵ One dissentient view is that of Beasley-Murray who says, 'We have no ground for believing

that John regarded all Jews as virtually Gentiles'. (such a conclusion from Mt. 3:9 would be a misuse of the passage)³⁶

The obvious feature missing from proselyte baptism but present in John's is the eschatological flavour. J. Jeremias ingeniously combines proselyte baptism with an eschatological suggestion by referring it to Rabbinic tradition. It has already been noted that proselyte initiation has been explained as a parallel to Israel's Sinai experience of circumcision, baptism and sacrifice. Jeremias thinks that just as the wilderness experience of the Jews was part of their experience of Divine deliverance, so John's wilderness baptism proclaimed an eschatological crisis which heralded future deliverance.³⁷ B.H. Branscomb makes the same point, 'The Rabbis also found in the Law proof that the forefathers had been baptized in the wilderness before entering the promised land ... The analogy of the first salvation to the one to come is often expressed!'.³⁸ C.H. Kraeling feels that Jeremias gives too high a degree of significance to the rabbinical interpretation of the wilderness baptism and points out, that typological exegesis is used to explain the present, but is not a factor in reconstituting the present.³⁹ Kraeling also believes that such a baptism would be appropriate only if John felt himself called to create a new Israel. It is not clear, in Kraeling's view that that is what John did intend.

N.A. Dahl strikes a new note in supposing that John is thinking of the festival to be held at the end of the age. Israel must be prepared for this by baptism in the wilderness and Messiah himself would conduct this great baptism.⁴⁰ Certainly there was a tradition that when Messiah came he would baptize his people. Moses Stuart offers a string of texts in support of this, to which must be added the Pharisees' question in John 1:25.⁴¹ This baptism is linked with

spirit baptism in Isaiah 44:3. John was seen as Messiah by many, and all four Gospels take care to point out John's role as the forerunner. Only if John viewed himself as Messiah could he have believed that he was carrying out Messianic baptism. There is no evidence to suggest that he did. However, if it is accepted that those who came to John were regarded by him as reduced to Gentile status, what better preparation for Messianic baptism than proselyte baptism? It is not necessary to go as far as Lightfoot and see John bringing Jews over to another religion,⁴² but it may be assumed at least that his baptism was an act of re-dedication by Israelites. Lustrations were a feature of Messianic movements before and after John and it does seem likely that John was establishing a new order, an 'Israel within Israel'.⁴³

One of the problems surrounding any discussion of John's baptism is the bias of Gospel material. It is wise to give heed to A.E. J. Rawlinson's comment on the Marcan account of it, 'So the Evangelist, with his missionary interest describes John's baptism in such a way as to suggest that it was identical with Christian baptism in everything except the gift of the Spirit!'.⁴⁴ It is difficult to rid oneself of Christian ideas and view John's baptism as a first century Jew might see it. The gospel writers present the message of Jesus as being identical with that of John, yet Jesus apparently did not baptize. R. Otto suggests that in fact there is a great gulf between the two. John offered, 'The sacrament of water baptism operating magically and ritualistically to wash away sinful matter'. This magical rite was 'intended to give assurance in the face of the coming judgement of wrath'. Jesus, on the other hand, offered no baptism. His parables of forgiveness promised salvation on repentance alone.⁴⁵

Otto may well be right in his estimate of the distance between

the preaching of John and that of Jesus. He has no evidence, however to suggest that John's was a magic, sacramental rite.

Rather, John's baptism needs to be seen as a link in the chain that includes levitical washings and proselyte baptism. It is Christian baptism, particularly as expounded by Paul that constitutes a problem when attempts are made to link it with John's baptism. One attempt is that of John Heron who argues on linguistic grounds that John's baptism is not, 'a symbolic washing analagous to Jewish levitical lustrations', but rather an acted parable of drowning on the lines of prophetic symbolism. Here is the end of the old life. It is not cleansing, but death and rebirth that John's baptism symbolises.⁴⁶

This, in Heron's view links it with Rabbinic statements about the proselyte being as a new born child and the seven day wait enforced by the Hillelites on the circumcised proselyte before he could be baptized because heathenism was like living in a tomb.⁴⁷ P. Lundberg, writing before Heron held a similar view. He thought Jordan was to be identified with the sea of death as it is in popular hymnody.⁴⁸

This is an interesting idea, but weak on evidence. There is no mention of this interpretation in the New Testament or elsewhere in early sources and statements about proselytes are not definite enough to admit of this view. In any case, the Rabbinic pronouncements are much later than John the Baptist and we cannot be sure that they reflect earlier teaching, although they may well do so. One point of value remains however. John stands in the line of the prophets and he cannot have been unaware of the prevalence of prophetic symbolism. Although criticisms of the interpretation of proselyte baptism along these lines have equal weight when applied to John's baptism, yet John's own personality could lead one to consider that prophetic symbolism may have been in his mind as he baptized. C.H.H.

Scobie describes John's baptism as 'a symbolic act by which the essence of his message was dramatized by the experience of those who accepted his message'.⁴⁹ As in the Old Testament, the symbol helped along the fulfilment, so baptism leads to a state of penitence, or crowns that repentance which has already begun. R.R. Osborn says of John's baptism that it was 'an actual fulfilment of Moses' dream, 'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets''.⁵⁰ John, by his baptism brought men and women to the place God desired, the place of preparation for Messiah.⁵¹

It seems then, that John's baptism was a preparatory rite on the same lines, but not identical to, proselyte baptism. It was as Rowley says, 'Not so much the rite of admission to an organisation as a preparation for a kingdom which was soon to be established by divine initiative in the world'.⁵² It could be argued that John was asking people to submit to a purity regulation to emphasise their devotion and eagerness to be ready. It was common for people to decide to live as though they were liable to a higher purity requirement (e.g. one could undertake to eat food as if one were a priest).⁵³ It is true that John's baptism properly belongs with Qumranic lustrations and other Jewish baptisms and it is difficult to decide, because of the bias of the main documentary evidence, whether there was a real difference in administration and meaning between such lustrations and John's baptism. It is possible to see John's baptism as an adaptation of the proselyte rite. He could have seen his people as Jews requiring new birth, or at least a new beginning. His baptism would then have been a kind of prophetic symbolism acting to bring his vision to fruition. Thus for the purpose of investigating proselyte baptism, it can be said that lines may be drawn between that rite and John's baptism both in its method and its meaning.

Such a link means, of course, that it is likely that proselyte baptism was practised in Palestine in the early first century.

Notes and References

1. Even before rediscoveries at Qumran. See H. Graetz, A popular history of the Jews, translated by A.B. Rhine (New York 1930) Volume 2 p.73 'The Essene who issued this call was John the Baptist, (i.e. the Essene who purified himself by daily ablutions in spring water)'. Also p.74 'certain it is that baptism was connected with admittance to the Essene order'.
2. W.S. Brownlee, 'A comparison of the Dead Sea Scrolls with pre-Christian Jewish Sects', Biblical Archaeologist 13 (1950) p.66-71 (p.69-70)
See also his 'John the Baptist in the New light of ancient scrolls' in The Scrolls and the New Testament, edited by K. Stendahl (London 1958) p.33-53 (p.34-36)
3. 'The youth of John the Baptist' NTS 11 (1956) p.70-75
4. e.g. J.M. Allegro, The Dead Sea Scrolls (London 1956) p.164, J.A.T. Robinson, Twelve New Testament Studies (London 1962) p.11 and O. Betz, 'Die Proselytentaufer der Qumransekte und die Taufe im Neuen Testament', RdQ 1 (1958) p.213-34 (p.222)
5. e.g. G.R. Driver, The Judaean Scrolls (Oxon 1965) p.492
H.H. Rowley, 'The Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect' in New Testament Essays, edited by A.J.B. Higgins (Manchester 1959) p.218-222 (p.219)
D.E.H. Whiteley, The Theology of St. Paul (Oxon 1965) p.166
F.M. Cross jr., The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies (New York 1961) p.204
J. Gnilya 'Die Essenischen Tauchbäder und die Johannestaufe' in RdQ 3 (1961) p.185-207 (p.205) cannot see John as a refugee from Qumran.
6. Driver p.491-2
7. See John Godwin's comments on this argument against total immersion. Christian Baptism (London 1845) p.83, E.J. Christiansen, 'Women and Baptism' in Studia Theologica 35 (1981) p.1-8 and D. Buzy, The Life of S. John the Baptist (London 1933) p.85
8. Driver p.501-2
9. Note G.R. Beasley-Murray's comment, 'What John thought about the relation of the Gentiles to the Kingdom we have no means of knowing: he ministered solely to the Jews and gave no word about the fate of the Gentiles'. Baptism in the New Testament (London 1962) p.33
10. The Consequences of the Covenant (Leiden 1970) p.195 (footnote)
11. St. Mark (New York 1971) p.26
12. John the Baptist (London 1964) p.91. See also P. Benoit 'Qumran and the New Testament' in Paul and Qumran edited by J. Murphy O'Connor (London 1968) p.1-30 (p.8)

13. F.C. Burkitt, 'The Mandaeans', JTh.S 29 (1928) p.225-235
14. This point was made about Qumranic washings by H.H. Rowley, 'Qumran Sect and Christian Origins' BJRL 44 (1961) p.119-156
15. Beasley-Murray p.39: Gnilka sees it as a mistake to derive John's from proselyte baptism. Both John's and proselyte baptism derive from Essenic washings. (p.205)
16. Horae Hebraicae (translated by R. Gandell) (Oxon 1859) Vol. p.66-67
17. 'From New Testament times until S.Cyprian' in A Study of Liturgy edited by C.P.M. Jones, G. Wainwright and E. Yarnold (London 1978) p.80-94 (p.81 fn)
18. 'Baptisms in the New Testament' SJTh 5 (1952)p.163-174 (p.164)
19. 'Baptism' Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible (one volume edition) (Edinburgh 1963) p.87-89 (p.82)
20. Mk.1:8, Mt.11:3, Jn.1:33, Acts1:5, 11:6, 19:4
21. Driver p.502
22. B.W. Bacon, The story of Jesus and the beginnings of the Church (London 1927) p.131
23. 'The ministry of John the Baptist', Expositor 8:13 (1917) p.420-431 (p.425-6)
24. See I.H. Marshall, Luke Historian and Theologian (London 1970) p.195 also Godwin p.225-226
25. Johannes der Tauffer (Göttingen 1932) p.68-9
26. Godwin p.236. See too Gnilka p.203 where he says that the baptism had the meaning of a sign demonstrated by the preparedness to repent of the candidate.
27. 'Baptism in Judaism' in Baptism in the New Testament edited by A. George (London 1966) p.25-60 (p.52-53). Gnilka p.204 says Josephus' comment is worthless as it treats it philosophically and overlooks repentance.
28. I. Klein, A guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York 1979) p.445. See also chapter 2 (p.45)
29. The Life and Character of John the Baptist (New York 1853) p.20. See also E. Schlink, The Doctrine of Baptism (London 1972) p.20
30. Die Urchristliche Taufe im Licht der Religionsgeschichte (Leipzig 1928) p.27
31. The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London 1948) p.16

32. The Good News according to Mark (London 1971) p.36
33. New Testament Theology, 5th edition (London 1958) p.160
34. The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist (London 1931) p.269
35. e.g. P.G.S. Hopwood, The Religious experience of the Primitive Church (London 1927) p.279-80
Brownlee (Stendahl p.87
W.H. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (London 1965) p.34
H.G. Marsh, The origin and significance of New Testament Baptism (Manchester 1941) p.65
T.W. Manson, 'Baptism and the Church' SJT (1949) p.390-403 (p.392)
A. Gilmore, Christian Baptism (London 1959) p.74
36. Beasley-Murray p.41. See also D. Smith, 'Jewish Proselyte baptism and the baptism of John' Restoration Quarterly 25 (1982) p.13-32 (p.26) who finds no evidence for such a view.
37. 'Der Ursprung der Johannestaufe' ZNW 28 (1929) p.312-320
38. The Gospel according to St. Mark (London 1937) p.13
39. John the Baptist (New York 1951) p.105. See Smith p.27
40. 'The origins of Baptism' in Interpretationes ad Vetus Testamentum pertinentes S.Mowinkel (Oslo 1955) p.36-52 (p.44)
41. Is the Mode of Christian Baptism prescribed in the New Testament? (Andover 1833) p.70. Isaiah 12:3, 44:3, Ezek. 36:25, Zech.13:1
42. Lightfoot, p.63
43. T.H. Robinson, The Gospel according to St. Matthew (London 1928) p.15
44. Westminster commentary on St. Mark 5th edition (London 1946) p.6
45. The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man (E.T. London 1943) p.77
46. 'The Theology of Baptism' SJTh 8 1955 p.36-52 (p.38)
47. See D. Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London 1956) p.110
48. La Typologie baptismale dans l'ancienne Eglise (Leipzig 1942) p.224-5
49. Scobie p.113
50. Forbid them not (London 1972) p.31
51. See J.D.G. Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit (London 1970) p.16
52. Rowley p.227
53. This suggestion came in a conversation with Hyam Maccoby

Chapter 5: Proselyte Baptism and the Dead Sea Scrolls

At the outset, it must be said that it is highly unlikely that proselyte baptism directly influenced the use of lustrations at Qumran. What is certain is that both are the product of a long slow development of the use of water as an initiatory lustration and as a means of continual cleansing.

The first problem to be faced is that of the meaning of the word 'baptism'.¹ May it properly be applied to Qumranic lustrations? Baptism does seem to have acquired a technical meaning in the New Testament where it is used only in connection with the baptism of John and Christian initiation. In this sense then, 'baptism' is inappropriate for the washings at Qumran. E.F. Sutcliffe makes administration the key to baptism, thus cutting out both John's baptism and proselyte ablutions.² For the purpose of this study, however, a broader definition has been employed, including all those rites using water for ceremonial cleansing, whether administered or not, and whether initiatory or not. This links Qumran with levitical washings, the proselyte water rite, John's and Christian baptism.

Some writers have viewed the cisterns at Khirbet Qumran with delight, seeing them as baptismal tanks, forerunners of the Johannine and Christian places of immersion. H.H. Rowley calls a halt to such fantasy. It is fatuous to link the cisterns with baptism in the absence of positive evidence, just as it would be absurd to argue that baptism must be practised in a house because it has a bathroom.³ Whilst wild speculation is to be avoided, the existence of storage tanks needs some explanation. The most obvious use is that suggested by E.F. Sutcliffe, that they are simply water cisterns.⁴ G.R. Driver points out that a lot of water would be needed by a community of around two hundred people in that arid area. The steps cut out in

the sides would then be used to help in the drawing of water as the levels fell and would facilitate cleaning.⁵

Others however believe that some of the cisterns played a liturgical role. J.M. Allegro says, 'At least two of the cisterns are of a size and shape consistent with their use as baptisteries'.⁶ W.H. Brownlee thinks that the principal indoor cistern is purposely designed for the rite of baptism. It has fourteen steps, (twice the perfect number) and these are subdivided into groups suggesting that special prayers were said at particular spots.⁷

That the Qumran Covenanters practised a system of washings is not in dispute. Those who argue that the cisterns are purely for water storage suggest that ritual bathing took place at the River Jordan (about six miles away) or at Ein Feshka (about two miles away) or even in the nearby waters of the Dead Sea.⁸ The most reasonable hypothesis might take in all three ideas. Driver points out that the number of cisterns is excessive for lustrations for purity,⁹ so it could be assumed that for convenience, some were designated for this purpose whilst others were used for water storage. However, other sites may well have been used, perhaps at particular times.¹⁰ All this is speculative and not of great importance. What is important is the meaning that members of the sect attached to the use of water. First, reference must be made to the initiation rite and the possible use of water there. It seems sensible to assume that the Qumran group were a type of Essene community. Josephus describes the Essene novitiate with permission to participate in the waters of purification at the beginning of the second year. This differs from the two year novitiate of Qumran.¹¹

The Community Rule (2:19) (DSSE p.74) describes the annual ceremony for the renewal of the Covenant. M. Black conjectures that,

'the neophytes were admitted to 'the purer waters of baptism' in the sight of the assembled people'. He goes further by saying, 'It seems probable too that the renewal of the Covenant vows was also symbolised by the assembled people entering the baths in order of their rank and status'.¹² Here is a picture of initiation by water rite, probably at Pentecost.¹³ Unfortunately the scene is mostly supposition. It is far from certain that candidates were admitted at this time and it is equally dubious that a water rite formed part of this ceremony. There is no implication even that baptism is a condition of admission.¹⁴ 'Purifying waters' are mentioned in chapter three, but only in connection with the unrepentant who will not be cleansed by such lustration. Klaus Baltzer gives a helpful outline of the structure of the Covenant liturgy and at no point does he suggest space for baptism.¹⁵

The Community Rule chapter five (DSSE 78-80) deals with initiation and contains precepts for those wishing to join the Community. The all-important point is the oath binding the candidate to return to the Law of Moses as interpreted by the sect. The use of water is mentioned only in connection with the men of falsehood who are under God's curse. 'They shall not enter the water to partake of the pure meal of the saints for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness!'. Vermes' translation leads to a consideration of the water rite as a preliminary to the meal - a purification on Pharisaic lines. C. Rabin makes a similar point as does S. Liebermann when he draws out the parallels between rules here and the Haburah.¹⁶ However, the phrase 'pure meal of the saints' is more often translated, 'The Purity of the Many'. It is unlikely that this refers solely to a ritual meal. A. Dupont-Sommer suggests that it is the name given to the communal centre, the place where they met for meals and the pool where they bathed.¹⁷ Brownlee believes 'the Purity' may include

sectarian food, 'or even the bodies of holy men in membership'.¹⁸ According to J. Pryke, 'The Purity' refers to the whole life of the Community.¹⁹ Certainly it is obvious that 'the Purity' cannot mean a ritual bath, since water and the Purity are clearly distinguished in this text.²⁰

There is therefore no direct evidence pointing to the use of water in an initiatory rite. However, it is utterly inconceivable that those from outside regarded as utterly defiled, belonging to the realm of Belial, would be admitted without a washing ceremony. Community Rule 6 may point to this when it states that the novice must not enter, 'the formal state of purity enjoyed by the general membership of the Community until the beginning of his second year'.²¹ Although it is always dangerous to argue from silence, the general impression gained is that although water may have been used in the initiation ceremony, it was either so usual as not to merit mention²² or ^{be} regarded as anything special because it was simply the first in a lifetime of lustrations. Whilst it is true, as G. Vermes says, 'When an adult Jew joined the Qumran sect, he had ... a personal and active part in the process of becoming one of God's chosen',²³ this does not mean that the water rite was the decisive act.

O. Cullmann has overstated the case in writing of Christian baptism and Qumranic lustrations, 'They are parallel in that they served as a rite of initiation. The first admission to these baths was a sign of acceptance into the fellowship'.²⁴ It could be argued with greater evidence to support its claim that the acceptance of his property into the Community was the decisive mark of the candidate's belonging (Community Rule 6:23, DSSEp.82).

Of great interest are two articles by B.E. Thiering in which, with great clarity, she puts forward a new theory about initiation at

Qumran. In the second of these she divides the scheme of initiation into the 'Outer, fleshly, provisional membership by water' which involves at its conclusion a lustration, and the 'Inner, spiritual, final membership by spirit', which is marked by spirit giving and participation in the sacred meal.²⁵ This scheme has the merit of linking the initiation rites with the flesh/spirit theology of Qumran and the priestly rites practised there. The initiation proper was that of purification by the spirit of holiness which was the real sacrifice. (Thiering disagrees with J.A.T. Robinson when the latter quotes with approval J. Thomas' conclusion that the tendency of baptist sects was to see ablution taking the place of sacrifice).²⁶ Ablutions were washing of the flesh, and as such were inferior and could presumably be overseen by a Levite, whilst the spirit cleansing must be performed by a priest. Such a theory also explains why the water rite is not mentioned - obviously it did not have the greater importance.

It can be seen then, that there is nothing in the Qumran rite to link it with the initiatory aspect of proselyte or Christian baptism. At best, as H.H. Rowley concedes, the candidate would consider his first bath as a special event, similar to the first communion of a newly confirmed Christian.²⁷

In her first article, Thiering opens up the point that cleansing from sin and the cleansing of the flesh are two separate stages.²⁸ She contrasts removal of sin in the present time with removal of sin at the End Time. In the former there is a distinction between inner and outer sin. Like Jesus, the Covenanters believed that the source of sin was in the mind and will, the flesh merely expressing the inner activity (see Mt. 5:21-2,27). Unlike Jesus, who dismissed washings, they believed that the flesh was defiled by sin and so

required purification. This is the distinctive contribution of Qumran. The flesh may be made clean by washing, but the inward sin requires expiation by sacrifice. The real, once-for-all entry was not flesh washing, but the inner atonement made by purification with the spirit of holiness. In the future, such distinction will be abolished. Evil deeds will be cleansed by the spirit of holiness and there will be a final abolition of sin. Such a scheme may be deduced from Community Rule 3(DSSE p.75), where cleansing of sin and expiation of iniquity is ascribed to the spirit of holiness and the spirit of uprightness and humility and flesh is made clean by sprinkling with purifying water.

What is the significance of all this for a study of proselyte baptism? It was made clear at the beginning that there is almost certainly no direct connection and it is only if assumptions are made about the Qumran rite that parallels may be drawn.²⁹ If admission was by a purificatory rite, practised by immersion³⁰ leading to fuller fellowship with the community and if it was regarded as special even if it was only the first of many baths, then it does have similarities with proselyte baptism. Like proselyte baptism, it would have been self administered but witnessed.³¹

References to lustrations practised within the community show that they were highly significant rites. It has been suggested that their true background lies in preparations for Temple Service,³² or, as has already been mentioned as a substitute for sacrifice.³³ There could be a link in the former suggestion with proselyte baptism, but certainly not in the latter. The meaning of Qumranic lustrations may provide a link, for as C.H.H. Scobie points out, they drew together washing for ceremonial defilement and the prophetic call for cleansing from sin.³⁴ It is made quite clear that external

washings are useless without inner reformation (see Community Rule 3, DSSE p.74, 5.DSSE p.79). Whilst it is difficult to show that proselyte baptism involved repentance and forgiveness of sin at the outset, it is clear that proselyte initiation as it developed assumed that both had taken place.³⁵

One missing ingredient in proselyte baptism is the connection with spirit baptism - something that links Qumran with John. The superior purification was practiced, if Thiering is right, as the final and significant act of initiation at Qumran. It also had the 'now - not yet' quality about it too, because such spirit baptism was thought of as happening in the End Time.

However, care must be taken not to read into this the later, more developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The real links are between this and Old Testament and Rabbinic statements about holy spirit. Ezekiel 36:25-27 is an obvious starting place, linking cleansing by water and the input of God's Spirit. Water and Spirit are linked in Genesis 1:2 and the many references to 'pouring' or 'filling' in relation to the Spirit may connect it with the idea of water. Certainly Jesus makes the connection (John 7:37-39) as do later Rabbinic authorities.³⁶ Jewish sources also connect the Shekinah with the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Ludwig Blau says, 'It is certain that the N.T. has πνευμα ἁγίου in the passages where Hebrew or Aramaic had 'Shekinah'.'³⁷ He stresses the point again in his article on 'Shekinah', giving the idea of God dwelling in man (Col.2:9, 2 Cor.6:16, John 14:23).³⁸ He might have mentioned also 1 Cor. 3:16. I. Abrahams links all this with proselyte baptism, 'Only in a state of ritual cleanness could the newcomer be received, 'under the wings of the Divine presence'', i.e. under the wings of the Shekinah which has a vital connection with

the N.T. doctrine of the Holy Spirit.³⁹

So Qumran could be one more link in the chain between proselyte initiation and Christian baptism, pointing forward to a time when water baptism would lose its importance because the superior baptism, that of the Holy Spirit had overtaken it.

Notes and References

DSSE: G. Vermes The Dead Sea Scrolls in English 2nd edition (London 1975)

1. H.H.Rowley complains that 'Few writers define what they mean by baptism' in 'Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect' in N.T. Essays & Studies edited by A.J.B. Higgins (Manchester 1959) pp.218-22 (p.218)
2. 'Baptism and Baptismal rites at Qumran?' Heythrop Journal (1960) pp.179-188 (p.179) where he says, 'There must be a baptizer and a person baptized'. See also his The Monks of Qumran (London 1960) p.124
3. Rowley, p.218
4. Sutcliffe, p.180
5. The Judaean Scrolls (Oxford 1965) p.43
6. The Dead Sea Scrolls (revised edition) (London 1959) p.90
7. 'John the Baptist in the new light of the Ancient Scrolls' in The Scrolls and the New Testament edited by K. Stendahl (London 1958) pp.33-53 (p.39)
8. See for example, F.F. Bruce, Second thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls 2nd edition (London 1961) p.51
9. Driver p.43
10. Vermes thinks that the reference in Community Rule 3 to 'seas and rivers' means that that is where such 'baptisms' were to take place (DSSE p.45)
11. W.H.Brownlee suggests that the second probationary year of Josephus is year one for Qumran. The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline BASOR Supplementary Studies 10-12 (1951) p.26 n.37
12. The Scrolls and Christian Origins (London 1961) pp.95-6
13. So A.R.C. Leane The Rule of Qumran and its meaning (London 1966) p.104 but P. Wernberg Møller, The Manual of Discipline (Leiden 1957) p.60 n.12 suggests it was on the day of Atonement because that Day and the Covenant renewal 'revolved around repentance and confession of sins'. Brownlee suggests New Year (p.53)
14. See Pierre Benoit, 'Qumran and the New Testament' in Paul and Qumran edited by J. Murphy O'Connor (London 1968) pp.1-30 (p.7), Driver, p.496 and R.K. Harrison, 'The rites and customs of the Qumran sect' in The Scrolls and Christianity edited by M. Black (London 1969) pp.29-36 (p.31)

15. The Covenant Formulary (Oxon 1971) p.161
16. Qumran Studies (London 1957) p.7 and 'The discipline of the So-Called Dead Sea Manual of Discipline', JBL 71 (1952) pp.199-206 (p.199)
17. The Jewish sect of Qumran and the Essenes (London 1954) p.88
18. Brownlee note 33 on 6:16 p.25
19. 'The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion in the light of ritual washings and sacred meals at Qumran' RdQ 5 (1966) pp.543-552 (p.544)
20. See Goran Forkman, The limits of the Religious Community (Lund 1972) pp.55-6
21. T.H. Gaster, The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect (London 1957) p.60
22. See Black p.94. Note also that circumcision is not mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but no-one would imagine it was not practised.
23. 'Dead Sea Scrolls' in Interpreter's Dictionary Supplementary volume (Abingdon 1976) p.215
24. 'The significance of the Qumran Sect for research into the beginnings of Christianity' in Stendhal pp.18-32 (p.21)
25. 'Qumran initiation and N.T. Baptism' NTS 27 (1981) pp.615-631 (p.626)
26. See 'Baptism of John and the Qumran Community' in his Twelve New Testament Studies (London 1962 pp.11-27 (p.16)
27. Rowley p.222
28. 'Inner and Outer cleansing at Qumran as a background to N.T. Baptism' NTS (1980) pp.266-277
29. Like those made by Vermes DSSE p.45
30. The Damascus Document 10:10-13 lays down rules for the amount and type of water, and although the correct translation is disputed, it probably orders enough water for immersion.
31. O. Betz, 'Die Proselytentaufer der Qumransekte und die Taufe im Neuen Testament' RdQ 1 (1958) pp.213-34 (p.219) suggests that a significant comparison may be made between the Qumran reception and proselyte baptism. He seems to suggest that as John's baptism was given to the Jews to signify a re-dedication, so Qumran signifies a return to the Torah.
32. N.A. Dahl, 'The Origin of Baptism' in Interpretationes ad Vetus

Testamentum (Oslo 1955) pp.36-52 (p.45) and D. Flusser, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pre-Pauline Christianity' in Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls (edited by C. Rabin & Y.Yadin (Jerusalem 1958) pp.215-266 (p.230)

33. D. Flusser p.235. Notice what A. Büchler says about daily Essenic lustrations. Studies in Sin and Atonement (London 1928) p.369 n.1. 'If it is remembered that the pious men at the beginning of the first century in Jerusalem brought every day a guilt offering for doubtful sins to cleanse themselves of every error possibly committed, the substitution of the daily immersion by the Essenes for such daily atonement will be better understood'.
34. 'John the Baptist' in The Scrolls and Christianity edited by M. Black (London 1969) pp.58-69 (p.64)
35. See above chapter 2 pp. 40-41
36. H.G. Friedmann, 'Feast of Tabernacles' in Jewish Encyclopaedia (New York 1901) pp.651-662. See also A. Guilding, The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship (Oxon 1960) p.98
37. 'Holy Spirit' in Jew. Encyc. 6 pp.447-50) (p.448)
38. Jew. Encyc 11 pp.258-260 (p.259)
39. Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospel First series (Cantab.1917) p.36

Chapter 6: Jewish Proselyte Initiation and the New Testament

If proselyte baptism was practised before the first century A.D. is there any trace of its influence in form or meaning in the New Testament? In the earlier discussion on the meaning of proselyte baptism it was seen that its basic use was to cleanse the convert from the pollution of paganism. Without doubt the earliest believers, brought up within Judaism would be suspicious of accepting Gentiles into full fellowship without some cleansing ceremony. Acts 10-11 points to such a problem and Acts 15 confirms it. Indeed, it appears that many insisted on the full proselyte initiation before a Gentile could be a follower of Jesus and a member of the Church. It must be remembered that the earliest Christians did not regard themselves as separate from Judaism.¹ W.L. Knox surmises that even Cornelius was later circumcised.²

It is clear that Paul did not hold this view, although he seems to pick out several ideas from the proselyte initiation rite for his own teaching on baptism. Galatians 3:26-7 is written in the context of the problem of admitting Gentiles into the Church and here Paul stresses that Baptism marks a new beginning and removes all previous relationships. A baptized person is no longer subject to the limitations of his past life. He shows in v.29 that the candidate is 'Abraham's seed', i.e. a true Jew. Of course, Paul's interpretation goes beyond that of the Rabbis which seems to stop at the legal point. The candidate has not become part of a new nation, nor even of a new religion, he has 'put on Christ'. Perhaps it is going too far to suggest as Ben Witherington does that Paul is freeing women from the restrictions of Rabbinic Judaism which involved them in post-menstrual lustrations and only gave them a place in the Covenant community by virtue of their connection with a circumcised husband or son.⁵ The simple message of the Galatians passage is that baptism is the

decisive thing in becoming part of the fellowship of Christ.

Baptismal doctrine is not spelled out in detail here because, (as in Romans 6) it was assumed that his addressees were familiar with its meaning. Could this be because it was not so very different from the Jewish instruction of proselytes? The new element is

ἐἰς Χριστόν The initiate is plunged into Christ, who has taken the place, for Paul at any rate, of the Law. F. Prat suggests that the phrase means, 'incorporation into him, immersed in him as a new element'. Christ is a 'second self' to the believer.⁴ Yet Christ is linked to Abraham in v.29. There is no word of a different Covenant. The baptized are Abraham's offspring.

The relationship of the Acts 15 council and this passage is important. There is of course no mention of baptism in that account. N. Levison sees this as an important break with the Abrahamic covenant and an affirmation of the new Covenant in Christ, but he says of baptism, 'It said nothing ... because it took it for granted that it was to continue, for it stood for purification from the Gentile past'.⁵ It is difficult to see, if the Abrahamic covenant is a thing of the past, why a Gentile needs purification. Does he assume that only Gentiles will be baptized? Luke paints a picture of harmony, but is it possible that the apostles, elders, and members of the Jerusalem church only required baptism of Gentile converts? Certainly there is no record of apostolic baptism save that of Paul. It is possible to argue that, as John seemed to preach, all had reduced themselves to Gentile status, so baptism is appropriate for all who would truly become sons of Abraham, but it would then be reasonable to expect some account of the baptism of the apostles.

A slight variation of this idea would see the first Acts baptisms as part of the Jewish renewal movement connected with Jesus' teachings.

Such movements used washings, generally repeated lustrations.

Has Luke re-written the history of the Day of Pentecost in the light of subsequent developments in the doctrine of baptism?

There are other hints that early Christian baptism did contain at first some idea of restoration of purity. 1.Cor. 6:11 deals with baptism under the symbol of washing. The use of the middle voice is interesting and has already been discussed.⁶ ἀπελουσασθε is used in LXX for Jewish cultic washings. The consecration of Aaron and his sons includes a washing by Moses (Lev.8:6). Contact with an unclean animal requires washing (Lev.11:40) and cleansing from leprosy needs total washing (Lev.14:8). D.H. Flusser who believes that the ritual aspect of purity lost all importance in Christian baptism sees in 1 Cor.6:11 a 'kind of poetical imagery still preserved'.⁷

R. Schnackenburg points out that the negative aspect of cleansing from sin is balanced by ἡγιασθητε. He notes that the O.T. concept of holiness 'denotes a removal from the realm of the profane'.⁸ Here there may be another point of comparison with proselyte initiation, for the decisive turning from things pagan meant a removal from the heathen world into that of faith. Paul is emphasising that the Corinthians are not exemplifying that kind of conversion.⁹

Although Ephesians may not have come directly from the hand of Paul, its thought is surely Pauline. 5:26 deals with baptism as washing. Here the whole Church is cleansed by Christ and it is possible that the text refers to Jesus' own baptism - the one baptism to fulfil all righteousness. However, the thrust of this verse seems to be as Schnackenburg suggests, 'Water alone is not effective; the cleansing and sanctifying power proceed from the word'.¹⁰ Is it possible that there is a link with the recitation of the commandments

when the proselyte stands in the water, or even a reference to the cleansing power of the Torah?

The next group of texts deals with baptism under the figure of death, burial and resurrection (Rom.6, Col.2:12-13, Eph.2:1,5-6, although baptism is not mentioned in the latter passage). Reference has already been made to Daube's view that the Rabbinic statement that proselyte initiation equals separation from the grave means more than corpse uncleanness.¹¹ Other texts refer to the proselyte as a new born child, giving the impression that initiation was a decisive thing signalling a totally new start. There is no need, therefore, to look to the Mystery religions for the background to Paul's thought, but it must be acknowledged that Paul has taken the analogy deeper than Rabbinic theology was prepared to go. The clue lies in the connection with Christ. Paul does not say, 'buried in baptism', but 'buried with him in baptism' and 'made alive together with him'. Paul takes the death and resurrection of Christ as historic facts just as the Rabbis took the events of the Exodus and Sinai as history. The proselyte re-enacted in his own self Israel's history by being circumcised, baptized and offering sacrifice. 'Enacted' is perhaps too pale a word, for it is more than an aide memoire. The nearest parallel might be the word *ἀναμνησις* used in N.T. accounts of the institution of the Eucharist and bearing the sense of re-presenting to God a past event so that it becomes operative in the present.¹² Certainly the candidate shared in these events as if he were there. Likewise, Paul teaches, the Christian in his baptism enters the experience of the death and resurrection of Christ. This perhaps is the real meaning of *εἰς Χριστόν* - incorporation into the Body of Christ by experiencing his history, just as incorporation into the fold of Judaism is by experiencing

the history of that nation. If this is indeed the background to Paul's thought, he developed it far beyond its meaning for proselytes. The 'new creation' of Paul enters into a wide-ranging fellowship, the 'newborn child' of the Rabbis joins a legal entity where normal entry is based on kinship.

1 Cor. 10:1-2 seems to have a connection with proselyte baptism. The early Church fathers saw a parallel between the Red Sea passage and Christian baptism. 'Moses truly baptized in water by causing the Israelites to pass through the sea and under a cloud. The sea represents the waters of baptism and the cloud the Holy Spirit' (Gregory of Nazianzus: Sermon 39). 'The Red Sea typifies baptism; Moses leading through the sea, Christ himself; the Israelites passing through represent the faithful and the death of the Egyptians the destruction of our sins' (Augustine: Sermon 352).¹³ Paul was no fanciful Augustine, he did not see allegory in every detail but is likely to have taken this picture from the Rabbinical commentary on this passage to justify proselyte baptism. Indeed, G. Friedrich says that the linking together of baptism and the wilderness period must be pre-Pauline because Paul himself avoids the linking together of Moses and Christ.¹⁴ W.D. Davies comments on the striking parallels present in the Mekilta and Midrash Rabba on Exodus. These he links more particularly to the baptism of Jesus.¹⁵ It is unlikely to have much relevance to our subject, however, since the Mekilta is of such uncertain dating and this part may well have been modelled in conscious opposition to the narrative of Jesus' baptism in the synoptics.

The main emphasis in this passage is not the meaning of baptism, but as the context shows it is an attempt to correct a false confidence in the rite held by some Corinthians. Even though the

Israelites had experienced God's deliverance in the events of the Exodus, some of them fell away. As C.K. Barrett says, 'It suggests that some Christians overvalued (or it might be better to say misinterpreted) their baptism regarding it as a prophylactic which it was never intended to be'.¹⁶ So this text does not add to the store of information about the possible influence of the proselyte rite on early Christian baptism. The only use that can be made of it is as a pointer to the early use of proselyte baptism and its interpretation as a Red Sea experience. Even this is open to some question. Jeremias is certain that this must be a Midrashic interpretation of the affair.¹⁷ Yet there is no real evidence for this as Pl. Lundberg points out, 'Quel qu'interessant et ingénieuse que soit l'hypothèse du Jeremias elle a cependant l'inconvénient que le seul témoin de ce que nous aurions ici une argumentation rabbinique concernant le baptême des prosélytes soit Paul lui-même'.¹⁸ The fatal flaw however lies in Jeremias' insistence that this would be something familiar to Paul's readers. As M. Goguel shows, the majority of Christians at Corinth were pagan in origin. They could only know of Midrash through Paul.¹⁹

Titus 3:5, undoubtedly part of an early Christian hymn could well reflect teaching on proselyte initiation. This would clear away any lingering idea that *παλιγγενεσία* and *ἀνακαινώσις* have their roots in the mystery religions. Reference may be made again to the Rabbinic assertions that a newly converted proselyte is like a child newly born. It is a new beginning to life, that past is totally finished. What has taken place is true regeneration.

The last single text within the epistles to be considered is Hebrews 6:1-6. The use of *βαπτισμοί* shows that it is not just one single act of baptism that is being considered here. Does this

represent a stage when baptism's main function was the removal of ceremonial uncleanness? That there were other washings current in some branches of the early church is evident from the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (c.A.D. 215) where in the instructions for baptism a bath on the previous Thursday is ordered.²⁰ This suggests that there were Christians of Jewish background who kept the laws of ritual washings (particularly perhaps the menstrual bath for women). These would no doubt see Christian baptism as an unique initiation, but as in the case of proselyte baptism, not precluding further washings. Is this then the background to Hebrews 6:2? The majority of commentators accept the six things mentioned there as fundamentals of the Christian faith, perhaps the outline of a primitive Christian catechism. The author is therefore exhorting them to progress from these rudimentary things which of course are all part of Jewish belief, to something more advanced. However, an alternative suggestion has been made by J. Clifford Adams who thinks that *του Χριστου* in verse 1 is a subjective genitive making the references to what Christ taught rather than what was taught about him.²¹ Jesus, he suggests, was generally consistent with Judaism. *βαπτισμοι* then refers to his teaching about Jewish lustrations, not about Christian baptism. Adams believes that those to whom the epistle is addressed, 'have accepted the message of Jesus, but not his person and work'.²² So there are three possible interpretations of Hebrews 6:2, first the one outlined by Adams, then baptisms as basic catechism which now needs to be supplemented as the readers are urged to delve more deeply into the Christian faith, or third that the plural form suggests there were those who still practised the law of purity, accepting Christian baptism as an exact parallel to proselyte

baptism - a once-for-all act of initiation into a system which used lustrations. While the latter interpretation may be tempting for one seeking links between the two baptisms, there is no conclusive evidence that the author was thinking in this way.

The next subject for investigation must be the epistles of Ephesians and 1 Peter. There have been suggestions that Ephesians has a baptismal background. R.R. Williams suggests that it is a catholicized version of Colossians expanded and recast as a baptismal homily.²³ N.A. Dahl believes it to have been written to instruct believers more fully in the meaning of their baptism.²⁴ His idea that the benediction opening of 1:3-4 may have developed out of blessings said before a Jewish ritual bath was taken up by J. Coutts who prepared a detailed parallel between these two passages and Jewish liturgy.²⁵

Are there any ideas in Ephesians which might have their background in proselyte initiation? J. Kirby thinks there are. He regards chapter 2 as a comment on the meaning of baptism. The contrast between the old life and the new reflects the fact that after baptism the proselyte left his old life behind. He thinks too that 'making alive' in baptism is a Jewish idea²⁶ and he explains 2:13 by the Jewish rule that blood must flow at circumcision and by the Rabbinic dictum that the proselyte's atonement was not complete until the blood of the offering had been tossed against the base of the altar.²⁷

If Ephesians exhibits ideas traceable to proselyte initiation, then surely those ideas are to be found in 1 Peter as well. It is almost universally accepted that this letter is connected with Christian baptism. Ideas range from the detailed analysis of H. Preisker who sees it as the baptismal liturgy of the Roman Church plus a more

general service beginning at 4:12,²⁸ through the extravagant theory of F.L. Cross who sees it as a Paschal baptismal Eucharist,²⁹ to T.C.G. Thornton's grudging acceptance that there are things in 1 Peter that could be said at a baptism.³⁰ More probable is the sober conclusion of F.W. Beare. He accepts the division of the letter into two parts (1:3-4:11 and 4:12-5:14), but believes they both come from the same hand. The writer is a Christian teacher who wants to strengthen his readers in the face of trial, so he 'incorporated into his letter the words that many of them had heard from his lips on the occasion of their baptism'.³¹ This then is a teaching letter designed to re-inforce elementary truths. This is no new faith, but the proper development of centuries old Judaism by which path many of the readers had come. they had received instruction as proselytes. Now the writer reminds them they have become proselytes to god through Christ (3:18 *προσαγωγή τῷ θεῷ*).³² It could be argued therefore that he sees the initiation of Christian converts as parallel to the acceptance and instruction of Jewish proselytes. That he could have drawn on existing liturgical form is no new thought. D.H. Tripp suggests that the first part of 1 Peter could be based on the Address of congratulation in Tractate Gerim 1 and adds that Col. 1:3-23, Eph. 1:3-3:21 and Heb. 12:8-13:21 would also correspond 'in theme and spirit'.³³ To link the Epistle with proselyte initiation has three advantages, first it treats the Epistle as a whole, then it is consistent with possible Petrine authorship and third, it preserves the link with baptism.

The main clue, as has already been pointed out is in 3:18, where as Van Unnik says, *προσαγω* is equivalent to the Hebrew *לְבָרְכָה* a technical term meaning 'to make proselytes'.³⁴ In this article he develops the idea of the Exodus background to 1 Peter, suggesting

even that the Trinitarian order is altered in 1:2 to read 'Father', 'Spirit', 'Son' to fit in with Exodus 24:38.³⁵ A proselyte had to stand on Mt. Sinai as the homeborn Jew did. He had to receive the Law and become one of the nation of priests (1 Peter 2:9). He must be circumcised, baptized and offer sacrifice (2:5). Then he was regarded as a new born child (2:2), he had joined the community of Israel (2:10). Is it straining the evidence too far to imagine that the author sees the Christian converts at Mt. Sinai, 'chosen and destined by God the Father', 'sanctified by the Spirit' (as the Israelites sanctified themselves Ex. 19:4), 'for obedience to Jesus Christ' (as they pledged obedience to the words of the Lord, Ex. 24:3), 'and for sprinkling with his blood' (as Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the Covenant, Ex. 24:8)? The Christians had become a member of the new Israel, the people of God.³⁶ Before a proselyte was accepted for instruction, he was formally asked, 'What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte? Do you not know that Israel at the present time is persecuted and oppressed and despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?' If he replies, 'I know and yet am unworthy', he is accepted ... (B.T. Yeb 47a). It was necessary to weed out those whose motives were insincere. 1 Peter offers the same kind of test in 1:6 where the candidate for Christian baptism is reminded of the various trials that will test the genuineness of his faith. Is it possible to supply the candidate's answer, 'I know and am not worthy' between verses 7 and 8?

Much the same idea is found in Ecclus. 2:1, 'My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal'.³⁷ The distinctive flavour of the Christian test was that it emphasised rejoicing in sufferings (1 Peter 1:6 cf Rom, 5:3, 1 Thess. 1:6, Jas. 1:2). Selwyn draws attention to Acts 5:41 where the Apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the

Name'.³⁸ This fits in well with the Jewish belief that Israel's sufferings were but a prelude to her glory.

After the Test, the proslyte 'is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments' (B.T. Yeb. 47a). Both intending proselyte and Christian candidate would have made themselves familiar with the basic elements of their chosen faith beforehand, so this is formal instruction making clear the standard that must be maintained by a full member of the Jewish or Christian Community. Obedience to the Law means that one must not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance' (1 Peter 1:15-16 cf Lev. 11:44-5). Teaching given to a Jew on sacrifices has been replaced in 1 Peter by emphasis on the efficacy of the 'precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot' (1:19).

The main instruction section in 1 Peter extends from 1:8-4:7. The instruction of proselytes did not follow a stereotyped pattern and various Rabbis doubtless had their favourite collections. Certain laws must have been emphasised. K. Köhler suggests that four things would have formed the basis for proselyte instruction viz., the Shema, the Ten Commandments, Leviticus 18-19 (possibly) and Deut. 27.³⁹ In connection with the first part it is interesting to note Selwyn's comment, 'the blessing in 1 Peter 1:3ff is not a hymn but a Christian Shema'.⁴⁰ Christians coming to the faith from a pagan background would need instruction in the holiness code. Even if a convert was not expected to keep the whole law of purity, there were certain standards to be maintained. Christians, like Jews, were expected to reflect the holiness of God (1 Peter 1:15-16 is a direct quotation from Lev. 11:44-5, cf Lev. 19:2).

The privileges of the new status are emphasised in 1 Peter 2:9-10, where the first verse is from Exodus 19:5-6 and the second emphasises their present status as God's people. Both verses would be equally

applicable to Jewish proselytes.

The other passages of possible relevance is 3:3. F.L. Cross suggests that there were three groups offering themselves for baptism; servants, wives and husbands and on 3:3 he refers the reader to Hippolytus' rule for removing ornaments, loosing the hair, as well as disrobing for baptism.⁴¹ In proselyte baptism total nudity was required, a woman's jewellery must be removed and braided hair loosed.⁴² It is just possible that the author of 1 Peter had this in mind.

For the final part of this study, material from the Gospels must be examined beginning with the baptism of Jesus as reported by the synoptics. What did Jesus know of baptism as he approached John? Presumably he was aware of the nature and significance of proselyte baptism, but there is no way of discovering his understanding of John's baptism. We may assume that he saw it as a kind of proselyte baptism applied to Jews, but what did his own baptism mean to him? To attempt to answer it is necessary to look carefully at the synoptic accounts. First, it may be noted that the baptism of Jesus is in a thoroughly Jewish setting. C.E.B. Cranfield notes the O.T. ring to the opening of Mark's narrative, *καὶ ἐγένετο ... ἡλθεν* and *ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις*⁴³ J.C. Fenton remarks on Matthew's pattern of events which closely follow the Exodus narrative. He connects Jesus' baptism with the Red Sea crossing and thinks that v.15 'to fulfil all righteousness' is almost equivalent to 'to fulfil the Scriptures' i.e. the baptism of the Red Sea is repeated by Jesus' baptism in Jordan.⁴⁴ Did Jesus see in his baptism a fulfilment of all previous baptisms? Was it the culmination of a pattern which led from Levitical washings through proselyte baptism and John's baptism? Did it fulfil once and for all the proselyte

recapitulation of Israelite history in himself?

What was Jesus' attitude to Jewish purity laws? From Mk. 7:15, Mt. 23:25-26, and Lk. 11:37-41 it would appear that he explicitly rejects Mosaic Law in this respect. Mk. 7:15 makes it clear that external forces cannot pollute a person and in spite of H. Maccoby's persuasive explanation of the Matthew and Luke passages⁴⁵ it would appear that Jesus rejected the Pharisaic purity regulations. In view of this it is difficult to imagine Jesus perpetuating a purity ritual. The vague record in John 3:21 and 4:1-2 about Jesus' baptizing activities seem like an attempt to justify later baptisms with dominical practice, rather than an historical record.⁴⁶ Is it unthinkable that Jesus' baptism was the culmination of all other baptisms and the effective end of all washings by water? The re-commencement of baptisms on the day of Pentecost would then have to be dismissed as unhistorical or as a continuance of proselyte or John's baptism and the subsequent Pauline development would have to be seen as an aberration.⁴⁷ J. Riches thinks that the Palestinian church obscured the clarity of Jesus' rejection of the purity barrier because the notion was so strong in current Judaism.⁴⁸ Even if such an extreme view is dismissed, two questions remain unanswered. The first has already been mentioned viz., what did Jesus' baptism mean to him? The second concerns the place of Jesus' baptism; does it belong with levitical washings, proselyte baptism and John's baptism or is it the first baptism of the new age? If the latter is true, (and most seem to see it as the prototype for subsequent baptisms) were the Apostles baptized, or was John's baptism deemed acceptable? If so, why were the Ephesian disciples rebaptized (Acts 19:5)? These questions do not belong to a discussion of proselyte initiation, but they do put a

question mark against the universality of the continuance of water baptism in the early Church.

Finally, John chapter 3 must be considered. It must be remembered that the Christian Church had been in operation for about sixty years before the appearance of this Gospel. Its portrayal of the Jews in a consistently bad light would not lead us to expect great spiritual insight from Nicodemus.⁴⁹ It was written at a time when almost all would acknowledge that proselyte baptism was well established and it may be that John is making some sort of comparison between the two so that the Church may be under no delusion about the difference between itself and Judaism.⁵⁰ W.F. Howard says that John 3:5 may be interpreted in three ways. First as a reference to John's baptism, or as proselyte baptism, or as baptism practised by the disciples.⁵¹ He dismisses the last alternative as 'hardly probable', and it seems unlikely that the evangelist would refer to John's baptism which had long ago ceased to be practised except perhaps by a heretical group. It is much more likely that *γεννηθῆναι ὕδατι* and *γεννηθῆναι ἐν ὕδατι* refer to Rabbinic teaching about a proselyte's new status. However, the addition of *καὶ πνεύματος* in verse 5 and the explanation in the next two verses highlight the difference between the new Christian rite and the old Jewish one. Nicodemus is portrayed as being ignorant, not surely of new birth by water, but of needing such a thing, being a native Jew. Thus John deals with Jewish privilege and with the superiority of the Christian rite at a single stroke. Thus the latest writing in the New Testament makes the distinction clear. Earlier writings (assuming that 1 Peter is earlier than the Johannine literature) whilst not mentioning proselyte initiation do seem to have taken it as a pattern in administration and in some points at least, in doctrine.

Notes and References

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2. St. Paul and the Church of Jerusalem (Cantab. 1925) p.155 note 13
3. 'Rite and Rights for women', Gal.3:28 NTS 27 (1981) pp.593-604 (p.595)
4. La Théologie de S.Paul (Paris 1949) Vol.2 pp.265-6 (38e ed)
5. The Jewish background of Christianity (Edin. 1932) pp.190-1
6. See chapter 3, p.55
7. 'The Dead Sea Sect and Pre-Pauline Christianity' in Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls edited by C. Rabin and Y. Yadin (Jerusalem 1958) pp.215-266 (p.244)
8. Baptism in the thought of St. Paul (Oxon 1964) p.4
9. See W.F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London 1948) p.56
10. Schnackenburg p.6
11. See chapter 2 pp. 42-43
12. See G. Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy 2nd edition (London 1945) pp.161-2. Also W.L. Knox, St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (Cantab 1939) p.97
13. Harald Sahlin has expressed the same view viz. that Jesus was the new Moses effecting the new Exodus: 'The New Exodus of Salvation according to St. Paul' in The Root of the Vine ed. A. Fridrichsen (London 1953) pp.81-95) (p.91)
14. TDNT Vol. 6 p.837
15. The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (London 1964) pp.40-1
16. I Corinthians (London 1968) p.25
17. 'Der Ursprung der Johannestaufe', ZNW 28 (1939) pp.312-20 and Infant Baptism in the first four centuries E.T. (London 1960) p.28
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20. G. Dix, The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (London 1937) p.4
21. 'Exegesis of Hebrews VI:1f' NTS 13 (1967) pp.378-85 (p.381)
22. Adams p.384
23. 'The Pauline Catechesis' in Studies in Ephesians edited by F.L. Cross (London 1956) pp.89-96 (pp.90-91)
24. 'Adresse und Proömium des Epheserbriefes' TZTh (1951) pp.241-64
See also J.T. Sanders, 'Hymnic elements in Eph.1-3' ZNW 56 (1965) pp.214-32 (p.214)
25. 'Ephesians 1:3-14 and 1 Peter 1:3-12' NTS 3 (1957) pp.115-127
26. Ephesians, Baptism and Pentecost (London 1966) p.156
27. Kirby p.158
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30. '1 Peter, a Paschal Liturgy?' JThS n.s.12 (1961) pp.14-26
31. The First Epistle of Peter 3rd edition (Oxford 1970) p.27
32. W.C. Van Unnik 'Christianity according to S. Peter' Expo.T 68 (1956) pp.79-83
33. 'Eperotema, 1 Peter 3:21' E.T. 92 (1981) pp.267-70 (p.269)
34. Van Unnik 81
35. Van Unnik 80
36. Van Unnik 81. Notice too D. Hill 'On suffering and baptism in 1 Peter' Nov T 18 (1976) pp.181-89 where he links baptismal suffering with Christ's suffering.
37. This verse is the prelude to a teaching section which could have served as a proselyte catechism.
38. The First Epistle of St. Peter (London 1946) p.128. Note also the reference to the Test in James 1:12 and M-E Boismard's showing of the literary dependence of Peter and James, 'Une liturgie baptismale dans la Prima Petri II 'Son influence sur l'epitre de Jacques' Revue Biblique 64 (1957) pp.161-83 (p.163)
39. Jewish Theology (New York 1918) pp.420-1
40. Selwyn p.122
41. Cross pp.31&34, Dix p.5

42. R.J.Z. Werblowsky, 'On the baptismal rite according to St. Hippolytus' in Studia Patristica 2 edited by K. Aland and F.L. Cross (Oxford 1957) pp.93-105 and W.C. Van Unnik 'Les chevaux défauts des femmes baptisées' Vig. Chr. (1947) pp.77-100 (pp.90-3)
43. St. Mark Revised edition (Cantab 1972) p.51
44. St. Matthew (London 1963) p.60
45. 'The Washing of cups' JSNT 14 (1982) pp.3-15, (p.12)
46. Although R. Schnackenburg attempts to have it both ways by saying that Jesus and his disciples did practise water baptism, but this was unconnected with Christian baptism. The Gospel according to St. John (London 1967) Vol.1 p.411
47. Michael Moreton 'Groundwork for Initiation' Theol 74 (1971) pp.522-9 suggests that Paul may have rejected water baptism and texts such as Gal.3:27 and Rom.6:3 may refer to spiritual baptism (p.525).
48. Jesus and the transformation of Judaism (London 1980) pp.138-9. See also G.W. Buchanan 'Worship, Feasts and Ceremonies in the early Jewish Christian Church' NTS 26 (1980) pp.272-297 (p.285)
49. A point missed by G.R. Beasley-Murray in his insistence on the unlikelihood of the Jews having a developed doctrine of regeneration at this time. Baptism in the New Testament (London 1962) p.227
50. cf Oxyrhynchus Papyri 840, part of an uncanonical Gospel reporting a discussion between a Pharisee and Jesus about cleansing.
51. The Fourth Gospel in recent Criticism and interpretation 4th. edition (London 1955) p.204.

Appendix to Chapter 6: Circumcision

It has already been made clear that the most important part of a proselyte's initiation was circumcision, and therefore its connection with the early Christian initiation rite must be investigated. Luke, the Gentile gospel writer records the circumcision of John the Baptist and Jesus.¹ Thus there is a tradition that Jesus was both circumcised and baptized, something that may have led early Christians to practise both rites.

Circumcision is a widespread phenomenon,² but there are three Old Testament accounts which give it a religious significance. The earliest version in Ex.4:24-26 (J) sounds like a primitive piece of folklore,³ the later 'P' version of Genesis 17:11 connects circumcision with the covenant, while Joshua 5:2 heralds the renewal of the rite which had apparently been neglected during the sojourn in the wilderness. The Levitical law (12:3) brings circumcision to infancy and Ex. 12:48 makes it clear that it is the one necessity for observing the Passover.

It is impossible to recover the original significance of circumcision. However, it is clear that it does not actually make a man a Jew. Birth is the decisive thing.⁴ In fact, P. Ch. Marcel argues that circumcision is a universalistic sign, because proselytes could receive it.⁵ Circumcision came to be a sign of the Covenant and developed a spiritual meaning - the Deuteronomist called for circumcision of the heart (10:16. cf. Jer. 4:4) as a remedy for stubborn disobedience to God.

Did Baptism supersede circumcision in the early Church? There is no doubt that at the beginning Jewish Christians practised both.⁶ The controversy reflected in Acts 15 is about the necessity or not of Gentile Christians being circumcised. It may be noted that in

deference to Jewish views, Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:2) who was born of a Jewish mother, but he did not circumcise the Gentile Titus (Gal. 2:3). All this shows that the place of circumcision within the Christian Church was not at all clear. It is unlikely therefore that the early Christians regarded baptism as a substitute for it. The key texts in the New Testament are Romans 2:25-29, 4:9-12 and Colossians 2:11-12. The first of the Romans passages is a commentary on Deuteronomy 10:16 and reflects sound Jewish theology. Here there is no repudiation of circumcision and certainly no equation of that rite with baptism. Such teaching might well be given to a would-be proselyte. Circumcision, baptism and the offering of a sacrifice did not in themselves make a man a member of the Jewish community, but they were signs of God's gracious acceptance and man's response.

The second Romans passage perhaps subtly undermines the argument for circumcision. On the face of it, it says merely that circumcision is the confirmation of the covenant. The use of *σφραγίς* used also of baptism,⁷ is interesting. Did Paul make the connection or was it 'a spontaneous extension of Genesis 17:11' as Beasley-Murray suggests?⁸ The real interest here lies in the fact that Paul shows that everything depends on faith. Jews believed that Abraham was the father of all proselytes. The Rabbis reckoned that there were 29 years between Genesis 15:6 (Abraham's acceptance by God through faith) and Genesis 17:11 (the command to circumcise), thus making a link with proselytes. But Paul shows here that one does not need to become a proselyte to attain righteousness. E. Käsemann says, 'His example shows that everything depends only on faith. Becoming a proselyte is not a prior condition of this. In fact then Judaism is robbed of both Abraham and circumcision'.⁹ The last statement is perhaps

rather too strong, but it does give the direction of Paul's developing thought which is summed up in Galatians 6:15 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation'.

Does Paul in Colossians 2:11 equate circumcision with baptism? O. Cullmann is sure that he does and that Christian Baptism fulfils and therefore repeals circumcision'.¹⁰ Among those who disagree with him is G.W.H. Lampe who says, 'Circumcision other than the 'true circumcision of the Spirit' such as the prophets foretold, is not likened to Baptism by the New Testament writers, but contrasted with it'.¹¹ However, there are those, who whilst not pressing the analogy too far, see that Paul could have been using circumcision as an illustration of Baptism. After all, circumcision is not Paul's only picture of baptism. Union with Christ in his death and resurrection is Paul's real interest, and if circumcision can shed light on this, there is no reason to be surprised at his use of it.¹² If Paul had meant that baptism had replaced circumcision, surely he would have made this quite clear with a thorough-going condemnation of the outmoded rite.¹³ Instead, he makes it a matter of indifference. Reliance on circumcision is certainly condemned, but it does not matter whether a man is circumcised or not, the real test is unity with Christ (see Gal. 6:15, 5:6, 1 Cor. 7:18-19). Some think that in this, Paul changed the course of the early Church. L. Köhler says, 'Had it not been for Paul, what might not have happened? For the earliest Christian Church seriously thought of making circumcision the absolute condition of entry into fellowship'.¹⁴ In support of this he cites Galatians 2.

It has already been noted that circumcision was a problem for would-be converts to Judaism and it is doubtless true that many

Judaism for the Gentile Christian Church. Did they consider that in baptism they were receiving a spiritual circumcision? Meyer points out that in New Testament days there were those in Palestinian Judaism who had a 'figurative and spiritualized view of circumcision', but it seems unlikely that this would have been understood without actual circumcision. Certainly in later days the transference could not have been made as there was fierce opposition to any understanding of circumcision other than the physical.¹⁵ Perhaps this fierce championing of circumcision as the mediator of salvation was caused in part by the confusion in early Christian minds as to its spiritual nature.

Gregory Dix introduced a new note in the discussion by suggesting that the circumcision, baptism and offering of the proselyte were paralleled in the early church by confirmation, baptism and the Eucharistic offering.¹⁶ The prohibition in Apostolic Tradition 25; 26:1-13 against participation in the Eucharist by Catechumens is simply the old Jewish rule against table fellowship with the uncircumcised.¹⁷ Manson makes the same point, suggesting that a trace of the old order may be found in 1 John 5:7f, where spirit, water and blood are parallel to confirmation, baptism and Eucharist. He accounts for the change in order, by suggesting three possibilities:-

1. The strong emotional characteristics of the gift of the Holy Spirit would fade, giving more attention to the confession of faith as the inspired thing rather than the confessor as an inspired person.
2. The Jewish order may have militated against its survival and
3. The order could have been changed by the theological difference between Hebrew and Hellenistic worlds. In the latter, *καὶ βάπτισ* was the first stage in mystery initiation.¹⁸

Lampe however does not find Manson's article convincing, preferring to find the source

of the Syrian aberration in Gnostic circles (p.90). Whilst the evidence for the view of Dix, Manson and their predecessors is rather shaky, their emphasis on the Jewish order does have the merit of attempting to trace Christian origins to their historical beginnings. Against this, Lampe does bring out many pieces of evidence pointing to the belief of the early Fathers that God's people are sealed for his own possession in baptism, analagous to, but not identical with circumcision (pp.84-282).

It seems therefore, that at the beginning, Jewish Christians practised circumcision and baptism, seeing no confusion between the two rites. However, as an extension of Paul's teaching, it became the norm to drop circumcision as an unnecessary rite. Those who wanted to make a sharp division between Christianity and Judaism condemned it. It is possible therefore that the earliest Christians did see a connection between proselyte circumcision and baptism and their own version of the initiation rite. It should be noticed that circumcision on the 8th day is still practised in the Ethiopic churches.¹⁹

Notes and References

1. Although there is no contemporary attestation for name giving at circumcision. See R. Meyer, 'περιτομή' in TWNT pp.72-84 (p.82)
2. See L. Köhler, Hebrew Man (London 1956) p.37 and B. Vawter On Genesis (London 1970) p.221
3. There are two interesting articles on this passage, the first being G. Vermes 'Baptism and Jewish Exegesis, New Light from Ancient Sources' NTS 4 (1958) where he concludes from study of LXX, Targums and early Rabbinic literature that the blood of circumcision has sacrificial reference and that Paul's conjunction of baptism and sacrifice (Baptism into Christ's death) shows that he understood this and thus made his doctrine of baptism parallel to that of circumcision.
J. Morgenstern, 'The 'Bloody husband' (?) (Ex. 4:24-26) Once Again' HUCA 34 (1963) pp.35-70 thinks that the origin of circumcision was the removal of taboo and redemption offered to the Spirit that had brought the child into being. Part of the tabooed object can stand as a sacrifice for the redemption of the remainder. Only secondarily does it act as admission to the clan or tribe.
Thus both connect circumcision with redemptive sacrifice.
4. R.E.O. White, The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation (London 1960)
5. The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation E.T. (London 1953) p.88
6. According to Marcel, Jewish Christians still do, although he gives no proof. p.92 fnl.
7. Rabbinic attestation for σφραγίς is late - Jer.Tal.Ber.9:3, Shem.Rabb 1:9.
8. Beasley-Murray p.175. Note that he believes with Lampe that if Paul did connect the seals it was only by way of contrasting the inner and outer 'seal'.
9. Romans E.T. London (1973) p.116
10. Baptism in the New Testament E.T. London (1950) p.56
11. The Seal of the Spirit 2nd edition London (1967) p.83
See also De Lacey O'Leary, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism (London 1912) p.57 where he says that no-one familiar with Jewish customs would make the comparison.
12. W. Moran makes what amounts to the same point in The Religion and Theology of Paul Edin. 1929 p.211
13. See H. Martin 'Baptism and Circumcision' Theol 53 (1950) pp.301-303 (p.302)

14. Köhler p.39
15. See Meyer pp.79-81
16. Confirmation or the Laying on of Hands, Theology occasional papers 5 p.1936 p.1. This view was also advanced by A. Seeberg, Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit (Leipzig) pp.232-3, and A. Stromberg, Studien zur Theorie und Praxis der Taufe (Berlin 1913) p.158
17. Dix p.7. See also his Shape of the Liturgy 2nd Edition London (1945) p.83
18. 'Entry into Membership of the early Church', JTh.S 48 (1947) pp.25-33
19. H.M. Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia London (1928) p.179

Chapter 7: The Primitive Catechism and the Instruction of Proselytes

The account provided in the Acts of the Apostles of early baptisms gives evidence of the minimum of preparation. On the day of Pentecost, after Peter's preaching, those who repented were offered baptism at once, 'in the name of Jesus' (Acts 2:38). Philip's converts believed the good news of the kingdom and were immediately baptized (8:12). After a brief Bible study, the Ethiopian Eunuch asks for and receives baptism. Even the God-fearer Cornelius is baptized after a sermon on the place of Jesus Christ in the scheme of faith and a confirming manifestation of the Holy Spirit.¹

There is no reason to doubt the historicity of Luke's account, for those who came to faith in Christ by the path of Judaism, native Jews, proselytes or God-fearers had already received instruction in the basic pattern of the faith and needed only to see the Messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus to complete their knowledge. It is not fair then, to say as R.J.Z. Werblowsky does, 'Christian baptism at first dispensed with catechesis',² or to deny all traces of baptismal instruction in the New Testament.³ Ethical instruction was unnecessary until the composition of the Church began to change and Gentiles with a pagan background sought baptism.

According to the account in Acts 15, it was the problem caused by the admission of Gentiles to the church that occasioned the calling of the Jerusalem 'Council' in A.D. 49. What was to be the status of non-Jews who had been baptized as Christians? Some Pharisee Christians believed they should be circumcised and taught to keep the Law (Acts 15:5), but others were in favour of a much more liberal approach. The outcome of the dispute was a judgement by James that ritual regulations were not to be enforced, but Gentile Christians would be expected to keep up a certain standard of purity, in particular an avoidance of anything to do with idolatry, marriage within forbidden

degrees and blood (either murder, or more likely the levitical prohibition of eating blood).

Although it is outside the subject under discussion, it may be useful to point out here that Luke seems to suggest the matter was settled. Gentiles were to be admitted without circumcision. However, reality was something far different and the conflict continued. There is no need to go as far as F.C. Baur and suggest that Luke's intention was to present a perfectly united church, giving a false picture for the sake of peace,⁴ but it is clear that there were divisions in the early church, some of them resulting from Jewish/Gentile differences. It is likely, however, that whether or not individual groups insisted on circumcision for Gentiles, they would insist on instruction. Instruction was and still is a most important part of proselyte initiation. In describing such initiation all writers include circumcision, baptism and sacrifice, but few point out the all important fourth - instruction.⁵ So important was this, that it continued into the baptismal rite itself when a selection of the greater and lesser commandments were read to the convert as he stood in the water. In some traditions scholars are still required to give final instruction after the bath marking the proselyte's entry into the community of Israel.⁶

Almost certainly, the early Jewish Christian teachers would have drawn on existing catechetical material, since this knowledge would raise the Gentile to the position of the Jew who needed only to the minimum extra teaching before he could be baptized as a Christian. W.D. Davies suggests that St. Paul's method would have followed the pattern of the Jewish Rabbis and that he might well have been indistinguishable from a Rabbi in proselytising.⁷ The proselyte was regarded as a new born child (B.T. Yebamoth 48b) or a babe one

day old (Tractate Gerim 2:6) so doubtless the instruction system for children supplied the catechetical needs of the teacher.⁸ The structure of the teaching is outlined in B.T. Yebamoth 48 and Tractate Gerim 2 and although these are late documents it is highly probable that they reflect early teaching and practice.

It has already been suggested that the Test which begins the proselyte initiation might have its parallel in the Christian system. L.W. Barnard and D. Daube quote Rom. 5:3, I Thess. 1:16, 1 Peter 1:6 and Jas. 1:2 as references to affliction and temptation possibly used in Christian catechesis, but as has been shown, 1 Peter 1:5-7 provides the nearest parallel to the Test.¹⁰

A similar procedure is evident for one seeking admission to the Qumran sect. He had to be brought to the Guardian at the head of the congregation to be examined, 'If he is fitted to the discipline (i.e. passes the test), he shall admit him into the Covenant that he may be converted to the truth and depart from all falsehood' (1QS 6:13b, DSSE pp.81-2). It would seem safe to suppose that a test of intending candidates was a normal procedure when they sought entry into one of the many branches of Judaism or Christianity. Candidates would have made themselves familiar with the elements of their chosen faith beforehand, but the real instruction did not begin until a person's motives had been made plain.

The second part of the Tannaitic scheme was the instruction of the candidate. Reference has been made to the idea that proselytes participate in Israel's history in their initiation.¹¹ They went through the experiences of the Exodus and stood on Mt. Sinai to receive the Law. W.G. Braude refers to the tradition that the moral filth that lay on Eve's descendants was removed by the reception of the Law on Sinai.¹² The proselyte therefore could not enter Israel until he too had been cleansed by instruction in the Law. Daube

says, 'In listening to the commandments during baptism the proselyte stood at Mt. Sinai'.¹³ Which commandments were used at the ceremony is not clear, but Daube quotes Midrash Sifre on Num. 15:41 as an undoubted reference to a catechetical collection. The setting is the desert after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt. God began to announce, 'some of the lighter and some of the weightier commandments, such as those concerning the Sabbath, incestuous unions, the show fringes and the phylacteries'.¹⁴

He also refers to the Rabbinic commentary on the book about the proselyte par excellence - Ruth - and sees there catechetical possibilities including the Test, for Ruth begged to follow Naomi only after she had been made aware of Israel's poverty. The Babylonian Talmud (Yeb. 47b) states that the proselyte is not to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. 'What is the proof?' asks Rabbi Eleazar. For answer he is directed to Ruth 1:18, 'And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more'. Ruth 1:16 apparently teaches also sabbath boundaries, forbidden private meetings between men and women, the keeping of the 613 commandments and the sin of idolatry.¹⁵

The proselyte had to be instructed as to his new position in Israel. He had to understand the obligations of his new life. Things that had previously been allowed were permitted no longer. He was subject to the food laws, the laws of uncleanness and ritual purity. It must be assumed he was taught the Holiness code (Lev. 17-20), for entrance within the people of God meant that he now had to reflect God's holiness.

The new Christian from a pagan background needed to understand the latter requirement even if he was not expected to keep the whole law of purity. It is probable that the New Testament reflects such

a catechism as Carrington suggests.¹⁶ The letter to Gentile Christians (Acts 15:23-29) has already been mentioned. Its prohibitions are based on Levitical laws (Lev. 17:10-14, 18:6-20 and 19:4). Other New Testament passages convey the same message (i.e. 1 Cor. 5:11, Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5). Perhaps the closest parallel to the Holiness code comes in 1 Thessalonians. This letter, as Carrington points out, was written not long after the Jerusalem 'Council'.¹⁷ It is possible to see within it the main outline of a catechism beginning with the Test in 1:6, 2:2,14 and 3:4; the commandments, 4:2 and a sample of those commandments gathered from Lev. 18:22 in chapter 4. Eschatological teaching and teaching on light and darkness found here are paralleled in other sources and will be discussed later. It is sufficient to say that Paul's earlier period shows a greater dependence on Jewish sources and a greater awareness of the parallels between a Jewish proselyte and a Gentile convert to Christianity than his later period allows.

As well as commandments dealing with purity, the proselyte had to understand the importance of charity. 'He is informed of the gravity of the precepts of gleanings and the forgotten sheaf, the corner and the poor man's tithe' (Yeb. 47a). Charity was a definite duty for a Jew and it was his right to expect charity from his fellows, so that the proselyte entered into the privilege and responsibility of charity. That this responsibility was taught to Christian converts hardly needs saying. Galatians 6:10 is built on the Jewish system, 'Let us do good to all men and especially to those who are of the household of faith'. Galatians 5:14 quotes Lev. 19:18, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', whilst Romans 12:13 exhorts Christian generosity and hospitality. 1 Peter 3:8-12 commands sympathy and love of the brethren, using Psalm 34:12-16.¹⁸

After teaching on the commandments, come sections on penalties followed by rewards and punishments. The candidate must no longer use the customs of the non-Jewish world, 'were you to eat suet you would be liable to karet; were you to profane the Sabbath you would be punished with stoning' (Yeb. 47b).

Christianity did not adopt the Jewish practice of penalties for transgressions, but there are plenty of indications that wrongdoers will not go unpunished. Like the Jewish candidate, the Christian must renounce his former life. He is also called to reflect God's holiness (1 Thess. 4:5-8, 1 Peter 1:14-17). He is warned that the immoral will not enter God's kingdom (Eph. 5:5, Heb. 13:4).

In the Jewish system, the list of penalties moves quickly on to rewards. 'Even as he is informed of the punishment for transgression, so he is informed of the reward for the fulfilment of the commandments'.

¹⁹ The Tannaim were rather reluctant to dwell on eschatology although they realised that righteousness is not necessarily given an earthly reward. To return again to the Rabbinic elaboration of the Ruth/Naomi story, the meaning of Ruth 1:18, 'She left speaking to her' is 'She became reticent at the concluding part of the catechism', i.e. at the eschatological section. However, this concluding part balances the Test. The candidate who knows of Israel's sufferings can now hear of rewards and glory that will overtake the righteous..

It is not surprising that the New Testament reflects the proselyte catechism. Early Christian missionaries would have used it as a model for instruction. Hunter believes that Paul and other New Testament writers are drawing from a common pool of Jewish teaching, perhaps coming from the Diaspora.²⁰

Early extra-biblical material shows Jewish influence too. The 'Two Ways' document which forms the first part of the Didache is almost

certainly a manual of conduct for Jewish proselytes adapted for Christian use. E.R. Hardy considers that it outlines the essentials of the law,²¹ and Carrington thinks it must be seen as catechetical material emanating from Greek synagogues.²² Interest in this treatise has increased since the discovery of the Qumranic literature revealed a similar exposition in IQS 3:13-4:26 (DSSE pp.75-78). A.R.C. Leaney believes that this is the ancestor of the 'Two Ways' treatise as it appears in the Epistle of Barnabas 18-21, Didache 1-6 and the Doctrine Apostolorum.²³ This 'Two Ways' teaching seems to have been a popular feature of Jewish catechetical method, and there may have been some kind of oral dependence, there cannot have been literary dependence.²⁴ The Qumran piece is in fact "Two Spirits" rather than "Two Ways" - the Prince of Light who is followed by the Sons of Light and the Angel of Darkness who leads the Sons of perversity or darkness. God is the creator of both spirits - he loves one and hates the other everlastingly. Man can be affected by both spirits. The righteous have God's holy spirit, but that spirit may be defiled. All the spirits of the Angel of darkness 'are set to trip up the Sons of Light' (IQS 3:24-5 DSSE p.76). The Mandata in the 'Shepherd' of Hermas portray a similar doctrine, particularly 6:2;1-2, 'There are two angels with man, one of righteousness and one of wickedness. "How then sir", said I, "shall I know their workings because both angels dwell with me? The Angel of righteousness is delicate and modest, meek and gentle, when he comes into your heart, he at once speaks with you of righteousness, of purity, reverence, of self control'. The possibility of oppressing the Holy Spirit and driving it out is made plain in 5:1;2, and 5:2;5 showing that Hermas is much closer to the Qumran doctrine of holy spirit than to that of the New Testament.

The way of the Sons of Light in IQS are the familiar virtues of

the fear of God, humility, patience, charity, goodness, understanding, wisdom, discernment and a detestation of all unclean idols. Those who follow this way will be blessed both in this life and in the world to come. On the other hand, the Sons of darkness are faced with, 'endless disgrace together with shameful extinction in the fire of the dark regions' (1QS 4:12 DSSE 76-7). The struggle between the spirits is an eschatological battle, but the victory is assured for the truth and the righteous will experience final purification and enlightenment.

The Epistle of Barnabas is nearer to Qumran than the Didache. Here the light bearing Angels of God are opposed to the Angels of Satan. Like the Rule, those who follow the way of light must exhibit fear of God, humility and patience. Specific commandments are mentioned and a reminder is given of the day of Judgement. Again, those who follow the Black One are following the road to death and eternal punishment, whilst the final vindication of truth is promised (chapters 18-21). L.W. Barnard's article, 'The Epistle of Barnabas and the Tannaitic Catechism' argues strongly for the influence of proselyte catechetical forms on this letter. He divides the letter into Haggadah (1-17) and Halakhah (18-20) and believes that the reason why the 'Two Ways' comes at the end of the epistle (in contrast to the order in the Didache) is that the writer is following the outline of the Tannaitic catechism on charity.²⁵

Most would agree that Didache 1-6 has a literary connection with Barnabas² in view of the many verbal parallels, but there seems to be a more Biblical ring to the passage. Werblowsky believes that it has a Deuteronomic flavour.²⁶ Here is no mention of angels, but simply of 'Two Ways'. Here quotations from Old Testament passages associated with catechesis such as Lev. 19 and Tobit 4 are mixed with passages

from the Sermon on the Mount. Apart from the words 'life' and 'death' eschatological promises and warnings are absent, although there is an eschatological coda to the whole work in chapter 16.

A brief outline of the Two Ways appears in The Clementine Homilies 7 chapter 5. Here they are two princes, the good prince of the right hand, and the destroyer on the left hand, both emanating from God. In chapter 7 of the same homily there is an exposition of the two paths of unbelief and faith.²⁷

What conclusions may be reached about the 'Two Ways' treatise and its relevance to a discussion on early catechism? It may be stated with confidence that a pattern of teaching based on a comparison between the good way and the evil way was common in Judaism and early Christianity. To uncover the roots reference can be made to such passages as Deut. 28-30 where the blessings of Obedience and the consequences of disobedience are spelled out. The Wisdom literature abounds in references to the way of uprightness and the way of darkness (see Prov. 2:12, 12:28, 15:10, 19, 24 and Eccles. 2-7). Here is a simple ethical dualism as yet undeveloped into the cosmological speculations of Qumran, yet the root of all later teaching is here. The New Testament's pattern of teaching reflects both the earlier and later dualism. The teaching of 1 Peter 3:10-12, quoting Psalm 34:12-16, and James 4 represent the former, whereas 1 Thess. 5:5 and Eph. 5:6-14 might reflect the latter. The writer of Ephesians describes Satan as 'the prince of power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience' (2:2). Paul interprets his own psychological experience in terms of the two ways or perhaps of the two impulses.²⁸ The Rabbis taught that within man was a continuous struggle between the **צ'ר הרע** and the **צ'ר הטוב**. Like the Prince of Light and Angel of Darkness, both impulses were

created by God. R. Judah's pronouncement is like the Qumran teaching, 'In the world to come God will bring the evil impulse and slay it in the presence of the righteous and wicked' (B. Sukk. 52a). Danielou finds the same idea in Testamentum Asher 1:3 where $\gamma\zeta'$ is translated $\delta\iota\alpha\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\nu$. It has become a specifically Jewish Christian word appearing frequently in the Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs.²⁹ A.R.C. Leaney believes that the combination of the two ways with the two inclinations in Test. Asher 1:3 suggests that the 'Two Ways' in its present form represents a relatively late rather than early stage in the Jewish Christian doctrine of man.

There seems then to be a basic framework underlying later written 'Two Ways' documents. It is possible to see parallels with the Tannaitic scheme of instruction as the diagram below will show.

	<u>BARNABAS</u>	<u>DIDACHE</u>	<u>QUMRAN</u>	<u>OTHERS</u>
1. Light and weighty commandments	Belief and love to God 19:2 Against sexual sins 19:4	Belief in God, love to neighbour 1:2 Against sexual sins 21	Ways of the sons of light 4:2	Shep Mand 1, Believe God is one. Commandments 2-4 et al. 1 Thess.4:1-7
2. Charity	Share - give 19:8-11	Almsgiving 1:5,6, 4:5-7		Mand.2:4, Duty of charity. 1 Thess.4:9-12
3. Penalties	Way of darkness 20 Eternal with punishment	Way of death	Way of sons of darkness 4:9-11, "Visitation of all who walk in it will be a multitude of blows".	Mand 12:1-2
4. Rewards and world to come	The day is at hand ... 21:3 See that ye be found faithful 21:6	The end is at hand, fiery trial 16	Final destruction evil and vindication of truth 4:12-26	Mand 12:6.5 1 Thess.4:13-5:11

It may be concluded that the 'two ways' theme developed orally and was written down in pre-Christian times for catechetical purposes especially among proselytes. It is also reasonable to accept a link between catechetical material used for proselytes and that used for Christian converts. Christianity did not grow up in a vacuum and given the fact that the earliest Christians were Jews and regarded Christianity as the next step in God's dealings with his people, it would have been remarkable if they had not built upon their Jewish heritage. Sandmel rightly reminds us of the literary disease of 'parallelomania'.³⁰ Care is necessary to avoid using Jewish parallels as evidence of dependence simply because the early Christians were Jews. However, one must not fall into the opposite trap and discard the religious background. One strong piece of evidence in favour of some dependence is to be found in Daube's appended note in E.G. Selwyn's commentary on 1 Peter. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the strange use of the imperatival participle in certain passages by Peter and Paul, (e.g. ὑποτασσόμενοι 'be subject', 1 Peter 3:1, Ephesians 5: 21) reflects written Rabbinic codes used by Christian teachers.³¹

It is reasonable to suppose that early Christian teachers used Jewish catechisms of varying kinds and adapted them for Christian use. It was necessary to bring Gentiles up to Jewish standards. They might not fully understand the wickedness of idolatry, nor the necessity to guard against the defilement of sexual sin. They must know the commandments and understand their responsibilities and privileges within the community. Further they must be acquainted with the punishments for disobedience and the blessings in store for the righteous. They have been reborn into a new community, a holy people, so that they must know what to do and how to behave. All this is equally true for the Gentile who comes as a proselyte to the Church

as to the synagogue. The Jewish scriptures and the Jewish way of thinking about God as the foundation for those who wanted to enter the Christian community. As W. Robinson said, 'It was only necessary to add to this in the first place, the fulfilment of Jewish Messianism in Jesus of Nazareth and you had something like the Gospel and standard of conduct resembling to some extent the average Christian way of life.'³²

For Jewish proselyte and Christian proselyte the synagogue would furnish continuing education, for teaching did not cease when the candidate was accepted. However, it is reasonable to assume that for the Christian there was something extra - the kind of fellowship and teaching implied in Acts 2:42-47, but Temple and synagogue worship still provided the staple diet.

Notes and References

1. But note that A. Schmemann thinks that 'according to Acts chapters 2,8,16&19, a baptismal catechism in the form of an alternating dialogue must have preceded the bath of immersion'. (Of Water and the Spirit (London 1976) p.20). It is true that questions and answers precede the baptism in each case, but to style them as 'baptismal catechism' is wishful thinking.
2. On the Baptismal Rite according to S. Hippolytus' in Studia Patristica II edited by K. Aland and F. Cross (Berlin 1957) pp.43-105 (p.94).
3. Nils Johansson says, 'There is not a trace of a catechumenate in the New Testament. Nowhere at all is there mention of a longer or shorter period of instruction in the main points of the Church's faith preceding baptism'. 'Making Christians by Sacraments' SJTh (1951) pp.123-138 (p.130). To deny any formal knowledge was required before baptism is to reduce that rite to magic.
4. Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ 2 Vols. (London 1876) Vol. 1 pp.5-10
5. One who does is E.R. Hardy in his 'Jewish and Christian Baptism' in A tribute to Arthur Vööbus edited by R.H. Fischer (Chicago 1977) pp.309-318 (p.311).
6. See S.B. Freehof, Current Reform Responsa (Cincinnati 1969) pp.99-100
7. Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London 1948) p.129
8. See P. Carrington, The Primitive Christian Catechism (Cantab. 1940) p.13
9. See L.W. Barnard 'The Epistle of Barnabas and the Tannaitic Catechism' ATR 41 (1959) pp.177-190 (p.180 fn.14) and D. Daube The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London 1952) p.117 fn.3
10. See chapter 6 p.91
11. See chapter 2 p.44
12. Jewish Proselyting in the first five centuries of the common era (Providence Rhode Island 1940) p.16
13. Daube p.121. See also R.E.O. White, The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation (London 1960) p.161 where he makes the suggestion that 1 John 2:7 refers to the repetition of the commandments during Christian baptism.
14. Daube p.123
15. Daube pp. 131-2

16. Carrington p.13
17. Carrington p.16
18. It is noteworthy that the author deviates from both the Hebrew and Septuagint versions of this Psalm. Is he quoting a current catechetical form? A suggestion that there may be a catechism used by 1 Peter and the Epistle of James is made by M-E Boismard 'Une Liturgie baptismale dans la Prima Petri II Son influence sur l'epitre de Jacques'. R.B.64 (1957) pp.161-83
19. Braude p.78
20. Paul and his predecessors (London 1961) p.54. Note too the interesting suggestion of J-C. Lebrun in 'Zwei Bermerkungen zu katechetischen Traditionen in der Apostelgeschichte', ZNW 56 (1965) pp.202-213 that behind the Areopagus sermon of Acts 17 lies a scheme of proselyte instruction. This he links with Apostolic Constitutions chapter 7.
21. Hardy pp.311-2
22. Carrington p.13
23. The Rule of Qumran and its meaning (London 1966) p.48
24. Notice the warning of Carrington (p.13) where he says that the process by which catechetical material arrived at the Christian church is 'the development of a living organism rather than the borrowing of a literature'.
25. Barnard p.185
26. Werblowsky p.94
27. There are other versions, notably in Clement of Alexandria's Paedagogus. See J. Danielou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity (London 1964) pp.317-8
28. See Romans 7 and Davies p.23
29. p.358
30. S. Sandmel 'Parallelomania' JBL 81 (1962) pp.2+11
31. In Selwyn pp.467-488. See also Hunter p.131 fn.1
32. 'Historical treatment of converts with reference to pre and post baptismal instruction', JThS 42 (1941) pp.42-3.

Conclusion

In a letter to a friend, F.J. Hort wrote, 'I think we shall avoid much disquietude by laying it down as a preliminary axiom that we must not expect ever to get to the bottom of the meaning of baptism'.¹ It is equally evident that this study has not settled the problems concerning the relationship of proselyte initiation and its Christian counterpart. The antiquity of proselyte baptism still belongs to the realm of probability rather than that of certainty, but perhaps a fresh airing of the available evidence has shown that much of the New Testament's teaching on baptism is easier to accept and understand if a similar Jewish rite is supposed.

It is clear that at the beginning of the common era proselytes were welcomed by Rabbis. Matthew 23:15 is a rather unkind comment, but it does underline the fact that missionary activity was taking place.² Ideas travelled easily in the Roman Empire and monotheism and the moral code must have seemed attractive to men and women wearied by the excesses of some of the contemporary religions. Whatever kind of uncleanness the non-Jew was deemed to have, some kind of washing would surely have been prescribed to deal with the impurity, particularly in view of the popularity of symbolic washings practised by the many 'baptist' sects.³

This is the strongest piece of circumstantial evidence for the probability of proselyte baptism predating Christianity. Essenic washings and that practised by John the Baptist belong to this general trend. Again, it is necessary to warn against the error of accepting that similarity in outward form automatically means correspondence in doctrine. But what did the instruction mean? Did it contain, like priestly lustrations, the dual aspect of cleansing and consecration?

Certainly in later times, the proselyte legally became a new person. He was reborn within the religion of Judaism with all its privileges and obligations and perhaps here is a possible clue to the beginnings of proselyte baptism. One of the most important privileges was the celebration of the Passover, and the earliest pieces about proselyte washing occurs in the context of Passover. As it was the chief feast of the year, it is likely that many proselytes would be admitted to the fold at Jerusalem at that time. That ablutions were important then is underlined by the story of Hezekiah's reforming Passover (2 Chron. 30:13-19), where many failed to observe the appropriate washing. If this is indeed the foundation of the proselyte rite, it could explain the Christian preference for Easter as the time for initiation and also perhaps provide another link with 1 Peter.

The thought of purifying from ceremonial uncleanness is absent from the records of early Christianity, although there are hints that it may have taken some time to die out. The idea of a new start is common to proselyte initiation and Christian baptism with new birth as the shared picture. But there are unanswered questions. Proselyte initiation was for Gentiles. Was early Christian baptism required only for Gentiles? Did those Jews who followed the Way accept baptism in the spirit of John's rite? Could there have been two sorts of entry into the faith at the beginning? J.C. Lambert reports Teichmann's theory that only Gentile believers had to be baptized, but in mixed churches Jews allowed themselves to be baptized for the sake of uniformity.⁴ This is a tidy solution, but there is not a shred of evidence to support it. It must be admitted that at its inception, Christianity was regarded as a Jewish sect and in its pre-Pauline phase was firmly rooted in Jerusalem. Proselytes asking for admission would naturally have to accept circumcision, and it appears, baptism

as well. It is also possible that they were required to make the customary sacrifice.⁵ If this picture is correct, then it may be assumed that baptism was already part of the proselyte pattern in Jerusalem at the beginning of the first century.

However, this does not mean that the pattern was universal. It is a wise course to search for the origins of baptism within Judaism, but the Judaism of the first century was more complex than was originally supposed. Robert Murray warns against the use of the term 'Judaism' for all the groups that spring from Yahwism. He prefers to reserve 'Jewish' or 'Judaism' only for those who looked to Jerusalem as their centre. Others he calls 'dissenting Hebrews'.⁶ This distinction means that different practices and doctrines could be expected from 'Jews', 'Hebrews' and Gentiles who became Christians in the earliest years. Those who looked to Jerusalem were of course blotted out in the putting down of various revolts of A.D. 66-135. If they had not disappeared, it might have been possible to see 'a practical blending of Judaism and Christianity'.⁷ The question of continuity or discontinuity of Christianity with Judaism has no simple answer. Some groups were no doubt scarcely aware that they had moved from their Jewish position. Such a group might require baptism from its Gentile converts and also a special consecratory washing for its Jewish adherents. It would certainly practice self baptism and there are traces of that in the New Testament and in the Syriac use of the verb ܬܒܝܬ. Present day Eastern Churches use of the declaratory passive baptismal formula may be a survival of this early practice.

Other groups, hostile perhaps to the Jerusalem section may have developed along Qumranic lines. The gospels record no baptizing activity after the baptism of Jesus. Did some 'dissenting Hebrews' repudiate water baptism seeking only the baptism of the Spirit prophesied by John and the superior final initiation that Thiering

suggests happened at Qumran? Is it too fanciful to suggest that this group believed that the new age had begun and that water baptisms belonged to the old time? The difficulty with this lies in finding an adequate explanation for the final emergence of administered water baptism.

Baptism is only part of the proselyte initiation. What of circumcision and sacrifice? The latter has been briefly mentioned and was possibly required by some 'Jewish' groups, but disappeared of course after A.D. 70. Gregory Dix supposed that this was transformed into the neophyte's oblation at the Eucharist.⁸ Circumcision, however obviously presented a problem to most if not all early Christian groups and it is likely that it was required at the beginning but swiftly became a cause of controversy and was replaced later by some groups by baptism and in others by an anointing prior to baptism. The latter is seen in the Syrian tradition where the 'rushma' (pre-baptismal anointing) is seen as a mark of ownership - a brand such as that on an animal. That this is a circumcision substitute is obvious in the strange description of the oil as 'sharp'.⁹ The Syrian tradition of Christian initiation strongly suggests the influence of the Jewish proselyte rites, but this does not necessarily mean as Dix would have it that this is the original and that later the position of the anointing was changed. If a plurality of sources can be seen at the beginning it is not strange to encounter different patterns in early Christian initiation, some reflecting continuity, some discontinuity with Jewish practice.

It has not been part of this project to enter into the controversy surrounding the mode and subjects of Christian baptism. Sometimes in the past scholars have used a discussion of proselyte baptism as an excuse for parading their party line. There seems no reasonable doubt that proselyte washing was practised by immersion. It is also

certain that families were baptized, although minors were given the opportunity to renounce their conversation on reaching the age of majority. Only first generation proselytes were baptized and the offspring of mothers baptized during pregnancy were not required to undergo baptism. It does not seem therefore, that the form and subjects of the baptism have much relevance in a debate about Christian baptism.

The conclusion to this study is necessarily untidy. Frequent use of the words 'probably' and 'perhaps' show that certainty is impossible. Without a doubt, Christian baptism has its roots in Jewish lustrations, but further than that is only possible to speculate. It seems likely that proselyte ablution was practised in the early first century and that its form provided the model for the early Christian rite. For some Christian groups teaching about proselyte initiation provided the basis for their doctrine of baptism, they may have seen it primarily as a purification and certainly not as proof of a permanent change of heart. Later doctrinal developments gave the rite at times an almost mechanical and semi-magical flavour. Such adhesions can be stripped away by beginning an examination of Christian baptism from a Jewish point of view, that is, in the context of purification preparatory to approaching the holy God.

Notes and References

1. Quoted by R.L. Child, 'Church of Scotland on baptism' Baptist Quarterly (1955-6) p.244
2. Max Weber, Ancient Judaism (Illinois 1952) says 'The most zealous Pharisees considered it as God-pleasing possibly to make one proselyte each year. (p.417). See also W.G. Braude, Jewish proselyting in the first 5 centuries of the Common Era (Providence R.I. 1940) pp.1-9. The strange Ethiopic reading of Mt. 23:15, 'You traverse sea and land to baptize a single proselyte' is certainly not correct.
3. For an account of Jewish baptist sects in the Jordan Valley see J. Thomas, Le mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie (Gembloux 1935). For a brief summary of more recent studies see E. Yamauchi, Pre Christian Gnosticism (London 1973) chapter 8.
4. The Sacraments in the New Testament (Edinburgh 1903) p.53. Note that C. Clemen uses this as an argument against proselyte baptism being the parent of Christian baptism. Primitive Christianity and its non Jewish sources (Edinburgh 1913) p.213. N. Levison thinks that Christianity only began 'when the Hebrew Christian came to look on himself as a proselyte too'. 'The proselyte in biblical and early post biblical times', SJTh 10 (1957) pp.45-56 (p.52)
5. Acts records that the early church worshipped at the Temple (2:46, 3:1)
6. 'Jews, Hebrews and Christians' NTS 24 (1982) pp.194-208 (p.198) Notice also that S. Sandmel heads the second chapter of his book, 'Palestinian Judaism', The First Century in Judaism and Christianity (Oxford 1969)
7. P. Henry New Directions in New Testament Study (London 1980) p.45
8. 'The "Seal" in the 2nd Century' Theol 51 (1948) pp.7-12
9. See S.P. Brock Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal tradition (Poona 1979) pp.96-7